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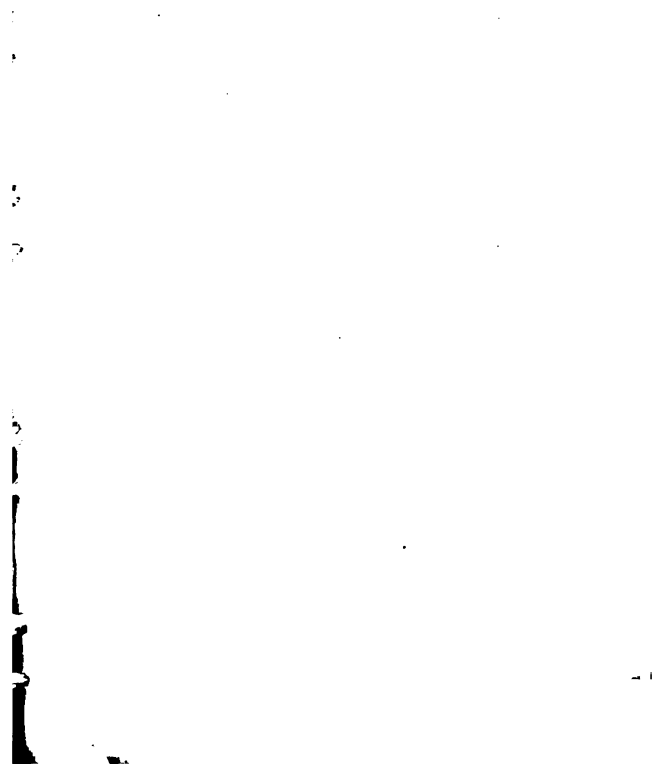
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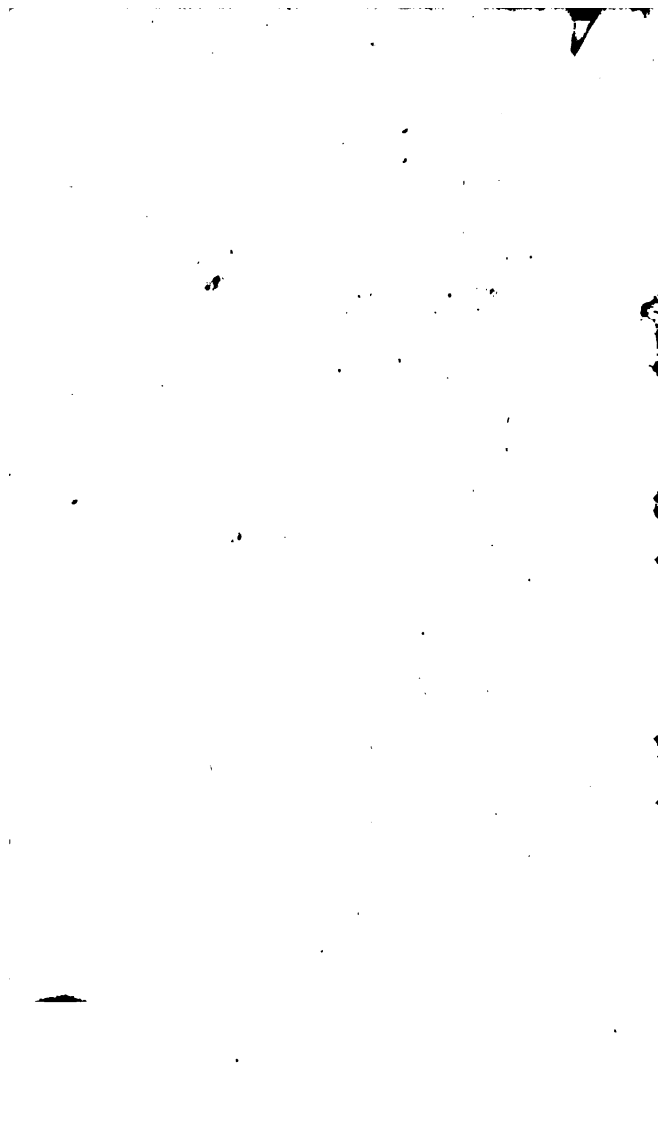
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# EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

BY

THOMAS CHALMERS, D.D.

TO WHICH ARE ADDED, ♡

REMARKS ON THE NATURE OF TESTIMONY, AND ON THE  
ARGUMENT DERIVED FROM THE COMMEMORATIVE  
RITES OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION:

BY

JOHN ABERCROMBIE, M. D. F.R.S.



The same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me.—John v. 38.

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# ADVERTISEMENT

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THE present edition of Dr. Chalmers's Evidences of Christianity has been prepared for the use of schools, by adding a copious set of questions. On a subject of such importance and interest, furnishing such a wide field of illustration, the intelligent teacher will, of course, add numerous explanations and questions of his own. Some instructors will entirely disregard those furnished by the editor; but the pupil cannot fail to derive advantage from having with the lesson a set of questions which serve to direct his attention at once to the leading and important points in the argument.

It is hoped that this work may be found useful as a series of Sunday lessons for the pupils of our common schools; or even as a text book for the higher classes in the Sunday-schools.

Some striking and convincing work on the Evidences of Christianity should be put into the hands of every young person; and it is believed that Dr. Chalmers has placed the argument on as strong ground as any among the learned and pious advocates of our religion.

The remarks of Dr. Abercrombie on the nature of testimony have been introduced on account of their affording a very conclusive answer to the famous *sophism* of Mr. Hume, which has certainly attracted more attention than either its weight or plausibility deserved.

The remarks of the same writer, on the commemorative rites of the Christian religion, have been admitted on account of their presenting a most satisfactory historical evidence, which has not hitherto been dwelt on with that attention which its importance merits.

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# EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

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## CHAPTER I.

### *On the Principles of Historical Evidence, and their Application to the Question of the Truth of Christianity.*

WERE a verbal communication to come to us from a person at a distance, there are two ways in which we might try to satisfy ourselves that this was a true communication, and that there was no imposition in the affair. We might either sit in examination upon the substance of the message; and then from what we knew of the person from whom it professed to come, judge whether it was probable that such a message would be sent by him; or we may sit in examination upon the credibility of the messengers.

It is evident, that in carrying on the first examination, we might be subject to very great uncertainty. The professed author of the communication in question may live at such a distance from us, that we may never have it in our power to verify his message by any personal conversation with him. We may be so far ignorant of his character and designs, as to be unqualified to judge of the kind of communication that should proceed from him. To estimate aright the probable authenticity of the message from what we know of its author, would require an acquaintance with his plans, and views, and circumstances, of which we may not be in possession. We may bring the greatest degree of sagacity to this investigation; but then the highest sagacity is of no avail, when there is an unsufficiency of data. Our ingenuity may be unbounded; but then we may want the materials. The principle which we assume may be untrue in itself, and therefore may be fallacious in its application.

Thus, we may derive very little light from our first argument. But there is still a second in reserve,—the credibility of the messengers. We may be no judges of the kind of communication which is natural, or likely to proceed from a person with whom we are but imperfectly acquainted; but we may be very competent judges of the degree of faith that is to be reposed in the bearers of that communication. We may know and appreciate the natural signs of veracity. There is a tone, and a manner characteristic of honesty, which may be both intelligible and convincing. There may be a concurrence of several messengers. There may be their substantial agreement. There may be the total want of any thing like concert or collusion among them. There may be their determined and unanimous perseverance, in spite of all the incredulity and all the opposition which they meet with. The subject of the communication may be most unpalatable to us; and we may be so unreasonable, as to wreak our unpleasant feeling upon the bearers of it. In this way, they may not only have no earthly interest to deceive us, but have the strongest inducement possible to abstain from insisting upon that message which they were charged to deliver. Last of all, as the conclusive seal of their authenticity, they may all agree in giving us a watchword, which we previously knew could be given by none but their master; and which none but his messengers could ever obtain the possession of. In this way, unfruitful as all our efforts may have been upon the first subject of examination, we may derive from the second the most decisive evidence that the message in question is a real message, and was actually transmitted to us by its professed author.

Now, this consideration applies in all its parts to a message from God. The argument for the truth of this message resolves itself into the same two topics of examination. We may sit in judgment upon the subject of the message; or we may sit in judgment upon the credibility of its bearers.



The first forms a great part of that argument for the truth of the Christian religion, which comes under the head of its *internal evidences*. The substance of the message is neither more nor less than that particular scheme of the divine economy which is revealed to us in the New Testament; and the point of inquiry is, whether this scheme be consistent with that knowledge of God and his attributes which we are previously in possession of?

It appears to many, that no effectual argument can be founded upon this consideration, because they do not count themselves enough acquainted with the designs or character of the being from whom the message professes to have come. Were the author of the message some distant and unknown individual of our own species, we would scarcely be entitled to found an argument upon any comparison of ours, betwixt the import of the message and the character of the individual, even though we had our general experience of human nature to help us in the speculation. Now, of the invisible God, we have no experience whatever. We are still farther removed from all direct and personal observation of him or of his counsels. Whether we think of the eternity of his government, or the mighty range of its influence over the wide departments of nature and providence, he stands at such a distance from us, as to make the management of his empire a subject inaccessible to all our faculties.

It is evident, however, that this does not apply to the second topic of examination. The bearers of the message were beings like ourselves; and we can apply our safe and certain experience of man to their conduct and testimony. We may know too little of God, to found any argument upon the coincidence which we conceive to exist between the subject of the message and our previous conceptions of its author. But we may know enough of man to pronounce upon the credibility of the messengers. Had they the manner and physiognomy of honest men? Was their testimony re-

sisted, and did they persevere in it? Had they any interest in fabricating the message; or did they suffer in consequence of this perseverance? Did they suffer to such a degree, as to constitute a satisfying pledge of their integrity? Was there more than one messenger, and did they agree as to the substance of that communication which they made to the world? Did they exhibit any special mark of their office as the messengers of God; such a mark as none but God could give, and none but his approved messengers could obtain the possession of? Was this mark the power of working miracles; and were these miracles so obviously addressed to the senses, as to leave no suspicion of deceit behind them? These are questions which we feel our competency to take up and to decide upon. They lie within the legitimate boundaries of human observation; and upon the solution of these do we rest the question of the truth of the Christian religion.

This, then, is the state of the question with those to whom the message was originally addressed. They had personal access to the messengers; and the evidences of their veracity lay before them. They were the eye and ear-witnesses of those facts which occurred at the commencement of the Christian religion, and upon which its credibility rests. What met their observation must have been enough to satisfy them; but we live at the distance of nearly 2000 years, and is there enough to satisfy us? Those facts, which constitute the evidence for Christianity, might have been credible and convincing to them, if they really saw them; but is there any way by which they can be rendered credible and convincing to us, who only read of them? What is the expedient by which the knowledge and belief of the men of other times can be transmitted to posterity? Can we distinguish between a corrupt and a faithful transmission? Have we evidence before us, by which we can ascertain what was the belief of those to whom the message was first communicated? And can the belief which existed in their

minds be derived to ours, by our sitting in judgment upon the reasons which produce it?

The surest way in which the belief and knowledge of the men of former ages can be transmitted to their descendants is through the medium of written testimony; and it is fortunate for us, that the records of the Christian religion are not the only historical documents which have come down to us. A great variety of information has come down to us in this way; and a great part of that information is as firmly believed, and as confidently proceeded upon, as if the thing narrated had happened within the limits of our eye-sight. No man doubts the invasion of Britain by Julius Cæsar; and no man doubts, therefore, that a conviction of the truth of past events may be fairly produced in the mind by the instrumentality of a written memorial. This is the kind of evidence which is chiefly appealed to for the truth of ancient history; and it is counted satisfying evidence for all that part of it, which is received and depended upon.

In laying before the reader, then, the evidence for the truth of Christianity, we do not call his mind to any singular or unprecedented exercises of its faculties. We call him to pronounce upon the credibility of written documents, which profess to have been published at a certain age, and by certain authors. The inquiry involves in it no principle which is not appealed to every-day in questions of ordinary criticism. To sit in judgment on the credibility of a written document, is a frequent and familiar exercise of the understanding with literary men. It is fortunate for the human mind, when so interesting a question as its religious faith can be placed under the tribunal of such evidence as it is competent to pronounce upon. It was fortunate for those to whom Christianity (a professed communication from heaven) was first addressed, that they could decide upon the genuineness of the communication by such familiar and every day principles, as the marks of truth or falsehood in the human bearers of that com-

munication. And it is fortunate for us that when, after that communication has assumed the form of a historical document, we can pronounce upon the degree of credit which should be attached to it, by the very same exercise of mind which we so confidently engage in, when sitting in examination upon the other historical documents that have come down to us from antiquity.

If two historical documents possess equal degrees of evidence, they should produce equal degrees of conviction. But if the object of the one be to establish some fact connected with our religious faith, while the object of the other is to establish some fact about which we feel no other interest than that general curiosity which is gratified by the solution of any question in literature, this difference in the object produces a difference of effect in the feelings and tendencies of the mind. It is impossible for the mind, while it inquires into the evidence of a Christian document, to abstain from all reference to the important conclusion of the inquiry. And this will necessarily mingle its influence with the arguments which engage its attention. It may be of importance to attend to the peculiar feelings which are thus given to the investigation, and in how far they have affected the impression of the Christian argument.

We know it to be the opinion of some, that in this way an undue advantage has been given to that argument. Instead of a pure question of truth, it has been made a question of sentiment; and the wishes of the heart have mingled with the exercises of the understanding. There is a class of men who may feel disposed to overrate its evidences, because they are anxious to give every support and stability to a system which they conceive to be most intimately connected with the dearest hopes and wishes of humanity; because their imagination is carried away by the sublimity of its doctrines, or their heart engaged by that amiable morality which is so much calculated to improve and adorn the face of society.

Now we are ready to admit, that as the object of the

inquiry is not the character, but the truth of Christianity, the philosopher should be careful to protect his mind from the delusion of its charms. He should separate the exercises of the understanding from the tendencies of the fancy or of the heart. He should be prepared to follow the light of evidence, though it may lead him to conclusions the most painful and melancholy. He should train his mind to all the hardihood of abstract and unfeeling intelligence. He should give up every thing to the supremacy of argument, and be able to renounce, without a sigh, all the tenderest possessions of infancy, the moment that truth demands of him the sacrifice. Let it be remembered, however, that while one species of prejudice operates in favour of Christianity, another prejudice operates against it. There is a class of men who are repelled from the investigation of its evidences, because in their minds Christianity is allied with the weakness of superstition; and they feel that they are descending when they bring down their attention to a subject which engrosses so much respect and admiration from the vulgar.

It appears to us, that the peculiar feeling which the sacredness of the subject gives to the inquirer is, upon the whole, unfavourable to the impression of the Christian argument. Had the subject not been sacred, and had the same testimony been given to the facts that are connected with it, we are satisfied that the history of Jesus in the New Testament would have been looked upon as the best supported by evidence of any history that has come down to us. It would assist us in appreciating the evidence for the truth of the gospel history, if we could conceive for a moment, that Jesus, instead of being the founder of a new religion, had been merely the founder of a new school of philosophy, and that the different histories which have come down to us had merely represented him as an extraordinary person, who had rendered himself illustrious among his countrymen by the wisdom of his sayings, and the beneficence of his actions. We venture to say, that had this

been the case, a tenth part of the testimony which has actually been given, would have been enough to satisfy us. Had it been a question of mere erudition, where neither a predilection in favour of a religion, nor an antipathy against it, could have impressed a bias in any one direction, the testimony, both in weight and in quantity, would have been looked upon as quite unexampled in the whole compass of ancient literature.

To form a fair estimate of the strength and decisiveness of the Christian argument, we should, if possible, divest ourselves of all reference to religion, and view the truth of the gospel history, purely as a question of erudition. If at the outset of the investigation we have a prejudice against the Christian religion, the effect is obvious; and without any refinement of explanation, we see at once how such a prejudice must dispose us to annex suspicion and distrust to the testimony of the Christian writers. But even when the prejudice is on the side of Christianity, the effect is unfavourable on a mind that is at all scrupulous about the rectitude of its opinions. In these circumstances, the mind gets suspicious of itself. It feels a predilection, and becomes apprehensive lest this predilection may have disposed it to cherish a particular conclusion, independently of the evidences by which it is supported. Were it a mere speculative question, in which the interests of man, and the attachments of his heart had no share, he would feel greater confidence in the result of his investigation. But it is difficult to separate the moral impressions of piety, and it is no less difficult to calculate their precise influence on the exercises of the understanding. In the complex sentiment of attachment and conviction, which he annexes to the Christian religion, he finds it difficult to say, how much is due to the tendencies of the heart, and how much is due to the pure and unmingled influence of argument. His very anxiety for the truth, disposes him to overrate the circumstances which give a bias to his understanding, and through the whole process of the inquiry, he feels a

suspicion and an embarrassment, which he would not have felt, had it been a question of ordinary erudition.

The same suspicion which he attaches to himself, he will be ready to attach to all whom he conceives to be in similar circumstances. Now, every author who writes in defence of Christianity, is supposed to be a Christian; and this, in spite of every argument to the contrary, has the actual effect of weakening the impression of his testimony. This suspicion affects, in a more remarkable degree, the testimony of the first writers on the side of Christianity. In opposition to it, you have no doubt, to allege the circumstances under which the testimony was given; the tone of sincerity which runs through the performance of the author; the concurrence of other testimonies; the persecutions which were sustained in adhering to them, and which can be accounted for on no other principle, than the power of conscience and conviction; and the utter impossibility of imposing a false testimony on the world, had they even been disposed to do it. Still there is a lurking suspicion, which often survives this strength of all argument, and which it is difficult to get rid of, even after it has been demonstrated to be completely unreasonable. He is a Christian. He is one of the party. Am I an infidel? I persist in distrusting the testimony. Am I a Christian? I rejoice in the strength of it; but this very joy becomes matter of suspicion to a scrupulous inquirer. He feels something more than the concurrence of his belief in the testimony of the writer. He catches the infection of his piety and his moral sentiments. In addition to the acquiescence of the understanding, there is a *con amore* feeling both in himself, and in his author, which he had rather been without, because he finds it difficult to compute the precise amount of its influence; and the consideration of this restrains him from that clear and decided conclusion, which he would infallibly have landed in, had it been purely a secular investigation.

There is something in the very sacredness of the subject, which intimidates the understanding, and restrains it from making the same firm and confident application of its faculties, which it would have felt itself perfectly warranted to do, had it been a question of ordinary history. Had the apostles been the disciples of some eminent philosopher, and the fathers of the church, their immediate successors in the office of presiding over the discipline and instruction of the numerous schools which they had established, this would have given a secular complexion to the argument, which we think would have been more satisfying to the mind, and have impressed upon it a closer and more familiar conviction of the history in question. We should have immediately brought it into comparison with the history of other philosophers, and could not have failed to recognise, that, in minuteness of information, in weight and quantity of evidence, in the concurrence of numerous and independent testimonies, and in the total absence of every circumstance that should dispose us to annex suspicion to the account which lay before us, it far surpassed any thing that had come down to us from antiquity. It so happens, however, that, instead of being the history of a philosopher, it is the history of a prophet. The veneration we annex to the sacredness of such a character, mingles with our belief in the truth of his history. From a question of simple truth, it becomes a question in which the heart is interested; and the subject from that moment assumes a certain holiness and mystery, which veil the strength of the argument, and takes off from that familiar and intimate conviction which we annex to the far less authenticated histories of profane authors.

It may be further observed, that every part of the Christian argument has been made to undergo a most severe scrutiny. The same degree of evidence which in questions of ordinary history commands the easy and universal acquiescence of every inquirer, has, in the subject before us, been taken most thoroughly to pieces,



and pursued, both by friends and enemies, into all its ramifications. The effect of this is unquestionable. The genuineness and authenticity of the profane historian, are admitted upon much inferior evidence to what we can adduce for the different pieces which make up the New Testament. And why? Because the evidence has been hitherto thought sufficient, and the genuineness and authenticity have never been questioned. Not so with the gospel history. Though its evidence is precisely the same in kind, and vastly superior in degree to the evidence for the history of the profane writer, its evidence has been questioned, and the very circumstance of its being questioned has annexed a suspicion to it. At all points of the question, there has been a struggle and a controversy. Every ignorant objection, and every rash and petulant observation, has been taken up and commented upon by the defenders of Christianity. There has at last been so much said about it, that a general feeling of insecurity is apt to accompany the whole investigation. There has been so much fighting, that Christianity now is looked upon as debatable ground. Other books, where the evidence is much inferior, but which have had the advantage of never being questioned, are received as of established authority. It is striking to observe the perfect confidence with which an infidel will quote a passage from an ancient historian. He perhaps does not overrate the credit due to him. But present him with a tabellated and comparative view of all the evidences that can be adduced for the gospel of Matthew, and any profane historian, which he chooses to fix upon, and let each distinct evidence be discussed upon no other principle than the ordinary and approved principles of criticism, we assure him that the sacred history would far outweigh the profane in the number and value of its testimonies.

In illustration of the above remarks, we can refer to the experience of those who have attended to this examination. We ask them to recollect the satisfac-

tion which they felt, when they came to those parts of the examination where the argument assumes a secular complexion. Let us take the testimony of Tacitus for an example. He asserts the execution of our Saviour in the reign of Tiberius, and under the procuratorship of Pilate; the temporary check, which this gave to his religion; its revival, and the progress it had made, not only over Judea, but to the city of Rome. Now all this is attested in the Annals of Tacitus. But it is also attested in a far more direct and circumstantial manner in the annals of another author, in a book entitled the *History of the Acts of the Apostles*, by the Evangelist Luke. Both of these performances carry on the very face of them the appearance of unsuspecting and well-authenticated documents. But there are several circumstances, in which the testimony of Luke possesses a decided advantage over the testimony of Tacitus. He was the companion of these very apostles. He was an eye-witness to many of the events recorded by him. He had the advantage over the Roman historian in time and in place, and in personal knowledge of many of the circumstances in his history. The genuineness of his publication, too, and the time of its appearance, are far better established, and by precisely that kind of argument which is held decisive in every other question of erudition. Besides all this, we have the testimony of at least five of the Christian fathers, all of whom had the same, or a greater, advantage in point of time than Tacitus, and who had a much nearer and readier access to original sources of information. Now, how comes it that the testimony of Tacitus, a distant and later historian, should yield such delight and satisfaction to the inquirer, while all the antecedent testimony (which, by every principle of approved criticism, is much stronger than the other) should produce an impression that is comparatively languid and ineffectual? It is owing, in a great measure, to the principle to which we have already alluded. There is a sacredness an-

nexed to the subject, so long as it is under the pen of fathers and evangelists, and this very sacredness takes away from the freedom and confidence of the argument. The moment that it is taken up by a profane author, the spell which held the understanding in some degree of restraint is dissipated. We now tread on the more familiar ground of ordinary history; and the evidence for the truth of the gospel appears more assimilated to that evidence, which brings home to our conviction the particulars of the Greek and Roman story.

To say that Tacitus was upon this subject a disinterested historian, is not enough to explain the preference which you give to his testimony. There is no subject in which the triumph of the Christian argument is more conspicuous, than the moral qualifications which give credit to the testimony of its witnesses. We have every possible evidence, that there could be neither mistake nor falsehood in their testimony: a much greater quantity of evidence, indeed, than can actually be produced to establish the credibility of any other historian. Now all we ask is, that where an exception to the veracity of any historian is removed, you restore him to that degree of credit and influence which he ought to have possessed, had no such exception been made. In no case has an exception to the credibility of an author been more triumphantly removed, than in the case of the early Christian writers; and yet, as a proof that there really exists some such delusion as we have been labouring to demonstrate, though our eyes are perfectly open to the integrity of the Christian witnesses, there is still a disposition to give the preference to the secular historian. When Tacitus is placed by the side of the evangelist Luke, even after the decisive argument, which establishes the credit of the latter historian has convinced the understanding, there remains a tendency in the mind to annex a confidence to the account of the Roman writer, which is altogether disproportioned to the relative merits of his testimony.

Let us suppose, for the sake of farther illustration, that Tacitus had included some more particulars in his testimony, and that, in addition to the execution of our Saviour, he had asserted, in round and unqualified terms, that this said Christus had risen from the dead, and was seen alive by some hundreds of his acquaintances. Even this would not have silenced altogether the cavils of enemies, but it would have reclaimed many an infidel; been exulted in by many a sincere Christian; and made to occupy a foremost place in many a book upon the evidences of our religion. Are we to forget all the while, that we are in actual possession of much stronger testimony? that we have the concurrence of eight or ten contemporary authors, most of whom had actually seen Christ after the great event of his resurrection? that the veracity of these authors, and the genuineness of their respective publications, are established on grounds much stronger than have ever been alleged in behalf of Tacitus, or any ancient author? Whence this unaccountable preference of Tacitus? Upon every received principle of criticism, we are bound to annex greater confidence to the testimony of the apostles. It is vain to recur to the imputation of its being an interested testimony. This the apologists for Christianity undertake to disprove, and actually have disproved it, and that by a much greater quantity of evidence than would be held perfectly decisive in a question of common history. If after this there should remain any lurking sentiment of diffidence or suspicion, it is entirely resolvable into some such principle as I have already alluded to. It is to be treated as a mere feeling,—a delusion which should not be admitted to have any influence on the convictions of the understanding.

The principle which we have been attempting to expose, is found, in fact, to run through every part of the argument, and to accompany the inquirer through all the branches of the investigation. The authenticity of the different books of the New Testament

forms a very important inquiry, wherein the object of the Christian Apologist is to prove, that they were really written by their professed authors. In proof of this, there is an uninterrupted series of testimony from the days of the apostles; and it was not to be expected, that a point so isoteric to the Christian society could have attracted the attention of profane authors, till the religion of Jesus, by its progress in the world, had rendered itself conspicuous. It is not then till about eighty years after the publication of the different pieces, that we meet with the testimony of Celsus, an avowed enemy to Christianity, and who asserts, upon the strength of its general notoriety, that the historical parts of the New Testament were written by the disciples of our Saviour. This is very decisive evidence. But how does it happen, that it should throw a clearer gleam of light and satisfaction over the mind of the inquirer, than he had yet experienced in the whole train of his investigation? Whence that disposition to underrate the antecedent testimony of the Christian writers? Talk not of theirs being an interested testimony; for, in point of fact, the same disposition operates, after reason is convinced that the suspicion is totally unfounded. What we contend for is, that this indifference to the testimony of the Christian writers implies a dereliction of principles, which apply with the utmost confidence to all similar inquiries.

The effects of this same principle are perfectly discernible in the writings of even our most judicious apologists. We offer no reflection against the assiduous Lardner, who, in his credibility of the gospel history, presents us with a collection of testimonies which should make every Christian proud of his religion. In his evidence for the authenticity of the different pieces which make up the New Testament, he begins with the oldest of the fathers, some of whom were the intimate companions of the original writers. According to our view of the matter, he should have dated

the commencement of his argument from a higher point, and begun with the testimonies of these original writers to one another. In the second Epistle of Peter, there is a distinct reference made to the writings of Paul; and in the Acts of the Apostles, there is a reference made to one of the four Gospels. Had Peter, instead of being an apostle, ranked only with the fathers of the church, and had his epistle not been admitted into the canon of Scripture, this testimony of his would have had place in the catalogue, and been counted peculiarly valuable, both for its precision and its antiquity. There is certainly nothing in the estimation he enjoyed, or in the circumstances of his epistle being bound up with the other books of the New Testament, which ought to impair the credit of his testimony. But, in effect, his testimony does make a weaker impression on the mind, than a similar testimony from Barnabas, or Clement, or Polycarp. It certainly ought not to do it, and there is a delusion in the preference that is thus given to the latter writers. It is, in fact, another example of the principle which we have been so often insisting upon. What profane authors are in reference to Christian authors at large, the fathers of the church are in reference to the original writers of the New Testament. In contradiction to every approved principle, we prefer the distant and later testimony, to the testimony of writers who carry as much evidence and legitimate authority along with them, and who only differ from others in being nearer the original source of information. We neglect and undervalue the evidence which the New Testament itself furnishes, and rest the whole of the argument upon the external and superinduced testimony of subsequent authors.

A great deal of all this is owing to the manner in which the defence of Christianity has been conducted by its friends and supporters. They have given too much into the suspicions of the opposite party. They have yielded their minds to the infection of their skept-

ticism, and maintained, through the whole process, a caution and a delicacy which they often carry to a degree that is excessive; and by which, in fact, they have done injustice to their own arguments. Some of them begin with the testimony of Tacitus as a first principle, and pursue the investigation upwards, as if the evidence that we collect from the annals of the Roman historian were stronger than that of the Christian writers who flourished nearer the scene of the investigation, and whose credibility can be established on grounds which are altogether independent of his testimony. In this way, they come at last to the credibility of the New Testament writers, but by a lengthened and circuitous procedure. The reader feels as if the argument were diluted at every step in the process of derivation, and his faith in the gospel history is much weaker than his faith in histories that are far less authenticated. Bring Tacitus and the New Testament to an immediate comparison, and subject them both to the touchstone of ordinary and received principles, and it will be found that the latter leaves the former out of sight in all the marks, and characters, and evidences of an authentic history. The truth of the gospel stands on a much firmer and more independent footing, than many of its defenders would dare to give us any conception of. They want that boldness of argument which the merits of the question entitle them to assume. They ought to maintain a more decided front to their adversaries, and tell them, that, in the New Testament itself—in the concurrence of its numerous, and distant, and independent authors—in the uncontradicted authority which it has maintained from the earliest times of the church—in the total inability of the bitterest adversaries of our religion to impeach its credibility—in the genuine characters of honesty and fairness which it carries on the very face of it; that in these, and in every thing else, which can give validity to the written history of past times, there is a weight and a splendour of evidence, which the testimony of Tacitus cannot confirm,

and which the absence of that testimony could not have diminished.

If it were necessary in a court of justice to ascertain the circumstances of a certain transaction which happened in a particular neighbourhood, the obvious expedient would be to examine the agents and eye-witnesses of that transaction. If six or eight concurred in giving the same testimony—if there was no appearance of collusion among them—if they had the manner and aspect of creditable men—above all, if this testimony were made public, and not a single individual, from the numerous spectators of the transaction alluded to, step forward to falsify it, then, we apprehend, the proof would be looked upon as complete. Other witnesses might be summoned from a distance to give in their testimony, not of what they saw, but of what they heard upon the subject; but their concurrence, though a happy enough circumstance, would never be looked upon as any material addition to the evidence already brought forward. Another court of justice might be held in a distant country, and years after the death of the original witnesses. It might have occasion to verify the same transaction, and for this purpose might call in the only evidence which it was capable of collecting—the testimony of men who lived after the transaction in question, and at a great distance from the place where it happened. There would be no hesitation, in ordinary cases, about the relative value of the two testimonies; and the record of the first court could be appealed to by posterity as by far the more valuable document, and far more decisive of the point in controversy. Now, what we complain of, is, that in the instance before us this principle is reversed. The report of hearsay witnesses is held in higher estimation than the report of the original agents and spectators. The most implicit credit is given to the testimony of the distant and later historians, and the testimony of the original witnesses is received with as much distrust as if they carried the marks of villany and imposture upon their foreheads.



The genuineness of the first record can be established by a much greater weight and variety of evidence, than the genuineness of the second. Yet all the suspicion that we feel upon this subject annexes to the former; and the apostles and evangelists, with every evidence in their favour which it is in the power of testimony to furnish, are, in fact, degraded from the place which they ought to occupy among the accredited historians of past times.

The above observations may help to prepare the inquirer for forming a just and impartial estimate of the merits of the Christian testimony. His great object should be to guard against every bias of the understanding. The general idea is, that a predilection in favour of Christianity may lead him to overrate the argument. We believe that if every unfair tendency of the mind could be subjected to a rigorous computation, it would be found, that the combined operation of them all has the effect of impressing a bias in a contrary direction. All we wish for is, that the arguments which are held decisive in other historical questions, should not be looked upon as nugatory when applied to the investigation of those facts which are connected with the truth and establishment of the Christian religion, that every prepossession should be swept away, and room left for the understanding, to expatiate without fear, and without incumbrance.

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## CHAPTER II.

### *On the Authenticity of the different Books of the New Testament.*

THE argument for the truth of the different facts recorded in the gospel history resolves itself into four parts. In the first, it shall be our object to prove, that the different pieces which make up the New Testament were written by the authors whose names they

bear, and in the age which is commonly assigned to them. In the second, we shall exhibit the internal marks of truth and honesty which may be gathered from the compositions themselves. In the third, we shall press upon the reader the known situation and history of the authors, as satisfying proofs of the veracity with which they delivered themselves. And, in the fourth, we shall lay before them the additional and subsequent testimonies, by which the narrative of the original writers is supported.

In every point of the investigation, we shall meet with examples of the principles which we have already alluded to. We have said, that if two distinct inquiries be set on foot, where the object of the one is to settle some point of sacred history, and the object of the other is to settle some point of profane history, the mind acquiesces in a much smaller quantity of evidence in the latter case than it does in the former. If this be right (and to a certain degree it undoubtedly is), then it is incumbent on the defender of Christianity to bring forward a greater quantity of evidence than would be deemed sufficient in a question of common literature, and to demand the acquiescence of his reader upon the strength of this superior evidence. If it be not right beyond a certain degree—and if there be a tendency in the mind to carry it beyond that degree, then this tendency is founded upon a delusion, and it is well that the reader should be apprized of its existence, that he may protect himself from its influence. The superior quantity of evidence which we can bring forward will, in this case, all go to augment the positive effect upon his convictions; and he will rejoice to perceive that he is far safer in believing what has been handed down to him of the history of Jesus Christ, and the doctrine of his apostles, than in believing what he has never doubted—the history of Alexander, and the doctrine of Socrates. Could all the marks of veracity, and the list of subsequent testimonies, be exhibited to the eye of the reader in parallel columns, it would enable him, at

one glance, to form a complete estimate. We shall have occasion to call his attention to this so often, that we may appear to many of our readers to have expatiated upon our introductory principle to a degree that is tiresome and unnecessary. We conceive, however, that it is the best and most perspicuous way of putting the argument.

I. The different pieces which make up the New Testament were written by the authors whose names they bear, and at the time which is commonly assigned to them.

After the long slumber of the middle ages, the curiosity of the human mind was awakened, and felt its attention powerfully directed to those old writings, which have survived the waste of so many centuries. It were a curious speculation to ascertain the precise quantity of evidence which lay in the information of these old documents. And it may help us in our estimate, first to suppose, that in the researches of that period, there was only one composition found which professed to be a narrative of past times. A number of circumstances can be assigned, which might give a certain degree of probability to the information even of this solitary and unsupported document. There is, first, the general consideration, that the principle upon which a man feels himself induced to write a true history, is of more frequent and powerful operation, than the principle upon which a man feels himself induced to offer a false or a disguised representation of facts to the world. This affords a general probability on the side of the document in question being a true narrative; and there may be some particulars connected with the appearance of the performance itself, which might strengthen this probability. We may not be able to discover in the story itself any inducement which the man could have in publishing it, if it were mainly and substantially false. We might see an expression of honesty, which it is in the power of written language, as well as of spoken language, to convey. We might see that there

was nothing monstrous or improbable in the narrative itself. And, without enumerating every particular calculated to give it the impression of truth, we may, in the progress of our inquiries, have ascertained, that copies of this manuscript were to be found in many places, and in different parts of the world, proving, by the evidence of its diffusion, the general esteem in which it was held by the readers of past ages. This gives us the testimony of these readers to the value of the performance; and as we are supposing it is a history, and not a work of imagination, it could only be valued on the principle of the information which was laid before them being true. In this way a solitary document, transmitted to us from a remote antiquity, might gain credit in the world, though it had been lost sight of for many ages, and only brought to light by the revival of a literary spirit, which had lain dormant during a long period of history.

We can further suppose, that in the progress of these researches, another manuscript was discovered, having the same characters, and possessing the same separate and original marks of truth with the former. If they both touched upon the same period of history, and gave testimony to the same events, it is plain that a stronger evidence for the truth of these events would be afforded, than what it was in the power of either of the testimonies taken separately to supply. The separate circumstances which gave a distinct credibility to each of the testimonies are added together, and give also much higher credibility to those points of information upon which they deliver a common testimony. This is the case when the testimonies carry in them the appearance of being independent of one another. And even when the one is derived from the other, it still affords an accession to the evidence; because the author of the subsequent testimony gives us the distinct assertion, that he believed in the truth of the original testimony.

The evidence may be strengthened still farther by

the accession of a third manuscript and a third testimony. All the separate circumstances which confer credibility upon any one document, even though it stands alone and unsupported by any other, combine themselves into a much stronger body of evidence when we have obtained the concurrence of several. If, even in the case of a single narrative, a probability lies on the side of its being true, from the multitude and diffusion of copies, and from the air of truth and honesty discernible in the composition itself, the probability is heightened by the coincidence of several narratives, all of them possessing the same claims upon our belief. If it be improbable that one should be written for the purpose of imposing a falsehood upon the world, it is still more improbable that many should be written, all of them conspiring to the same perverse and unnatural object. No one can doubt, at least, that of the multitude of written testimonies which have come down to us, the true must greatly preponderate over the false; and that the deceitful principle, though it exists sometimes, could never operate to such an extent, as to carry any great or general imposition in the face of all the documents which are before us. The supposition must be extended much farther than we have yet carried it, before we reach the degree of evidence and of testimony, of which, on many points of ancient history, we are at this moment in actual possession. Many documents have been collected, professing to be written at different times, and by men of different countries. In this way a great body of ancient literature has been formed, from which we can collect many points of evidence, too tedious to enumerate. Do we find the express concurrence of several authors to the same piece of history? Do we find, what is still more impressive, events formally announced in one narrative, not told over again, but implied and proceeded upon as true in another? Do we find the succession of history, through a series of ages, supported in a way that is natural and consistent? Do

we find those compositions which profess a higher antiquity, appealed to by those which profess a lower? These, and a number of other points, which meet every scholar who betakes himself to the actual investigation, give a most warm and living character of reality to the history of past times. There is a perversity of mind which may resist all this. There is no end to the fancies of skepticism. We may plead in vain the number of written testimonies, their artless coincidence, and the perfect undesignedness of manner by which they often supply the circumstances that serve both to guide and satisfy the inquirer, and to throw light and support upon one another. The infidel will still have something behind which he can intrench himself; and his last supposition, monstrous and unnatural as it is, may be, that the whole of written history is a laborious fabrication, sustained for many ages and concurred in by many individuals, with no other purpose than to enjoy the anticipated blunders of the men of future times, whom they had combined with so much dexterity to bewilder and lead astray.

If it were possible to summon up to the presence of the mind the whole mass of spoken testimony, it would be found, that what was false bore a very small proportion to what was true. For many obvious reasons, the proportion of the false to the true must be also small in written testimony. Yet instances of falsehood occur in both; and the actual ability to separate the false from the true in written history, proves that historical evidence has its principles and its probabilities to go upon. There may be the natural signs of dishonesty. There may be the wildness and improbability of the narrative. There may be a total want of agreement on the part of other documents. There may be the silence of every author for ages after the pretended date of the manuscript in question. There may be all these, in sufficient abundance to convict the manuscript of forgery and falsehood. This has actually been done in several instances. The skill and discernment of the

human mind upon the subject of historical evidence, have been improved by the exercise. The few cases in which sentence of condemnation has been given, are so many testimonies to the competency of the tribunal which has sat in judgment over them, and give a stability to their verdict when any document is approved of. It is a peculiar subject, and the men who stand at a distance from it may multiply their suspicions and their skepticism at pleasure; but no intelligent man ever entered into the details, without feeling the most familiar and satisfying conviction of that credit and confidence which it is in the power of historical evidence to bestow.

Now, to apply this to the object of our present division, which is to ascertain the age of the document, and the person who is the author of it. These are points of information which may be collected from the performance itself. They may be found in the body of the composition, or they may be more formally announced in the title-page—and every time that the book is referred to by its title, or the name of the author and age of the publication are announced in any other document that has come down to us, these points of information receive additional proof from the testimony of subsequent writers.

The New Testament is bound up in one volume, but we would be underrating its evidence if we regarded it only as one testimony, and that the truth of the facts recorded in it rested upon the testimony of one historian. It is not one publication, but a collection of several publications, which are ascribed to different authors, and made their first appearance in different parts of the world. To fix the date of their appearance, it is necessary to institute a separate inquiry for each publication; and it is the unexcepted testimony of all subsequent writers, that two of the Gospels and several of the Epistles, were written by the immediate disciples of our Saviour, and published in their lifetime. Celsus, an enemy of the Christian faith, refers to the

affairs of Jesus as written by his disciples. He never thinks of disputing the fact; and from the extracts which he makes for the purpose of criticism, there can be no doubt in the mind of the reader that it is one or other of the four Gospels to which he refers. The single testimony of Celsus may be considered as decisive of the fact, that the story of Jesus and of his life was actually written by his disciples. Celsus writes about a hundred years after the alleged time of the publication of this story; but that it was written by the companions of this Jesus, is a fact which he never thinks of disputing. He takes it upon the strength of its general notoriety, and the whole history of that period furnishes nothing that can attach any doubt or suspicion to this circumstance. Referring to a principle already taken notice of, had it been the history of a philosopher instead of a prophet, its authenticity would have been admitted without any formal testimony to that effect. It would have been admitted so to speak, upon the mere existence of the title-page, combined with this circumstance, that the whole course of history or tradition does not furnish us with a single fact, leading us to believe that the correctness of this title-page was ever questioned. It would have been admitted, not because it was asserted by subsequent writers, but because they made no assertion upon the subject, because they never thought of converting it into a matter of discussion, and because their occasional references to the book in question would be looked upon as carrying in them a tacit acknowledgment, that it was the very same book which it professed to be at the present day. The distinct assertion of Celsus that the pieces in question were written by the companions of Jesus, though even at the distance of a hundred years, is an argument in favour of their authenticity, which cannot be alleged for many of the most esteemed compositions of antiquity. It is the addition of a formal testimony to that kind of general evidence, which is founded upon the tacit or implied



concurrence of subsequent writers, and which is held to be perfectly decisive in similar cases.

Had the pieces which make up the New Testament been the only documents of past times, the mere existence of a pretension to such an age, and to such an author, resting on their own information, would have been sustained as a certain degree of evidence, that the real age and the real author had been assigned to them.

But we have the testimony of subsequent authors to the same effect; and it is to be remarked, that it is by far the most crowded, and the most closely sustained series of testimonies, of which we have any example in the whole field of ancient history. When we assigned the testimony of Celsus, it is not to be supposed that this is the very first which occurs after the days of the apostles. The blank of a hundred years between the publication of the original story and the publication of Celsus, is filled up by antecedent testimonies, which, in all fairness, should be counted more decisive of the point in question. They are the testimonies of Christian writers, and, in as far as a nearer opportunity of obtaining correct information is concerned, they should be held more valuable than the testimony of Celsus. These references are of three kinds :—*First*, In some cases, their reference to the books of the New Testament is made in the form of an express quotation, and the author particularly named. *Secondly*, In other cases, the quotation is made without reference to the particular author, and ushered in by the general words, "*as it is written.*" And, *Thirdly*, There are innumerable allusions to the different parts of the New Testament, scattered over all the writings of the earlier fathers. In this last case there is no express citation; but we have the sentiment, the turn of expression, the very words of the New Testament, repeated so often, and by such a number of different writers, as to leave no doubt upon the mind that they were copied from one common original, which was at that period held in high reverence and estimation. In pursuing the train

of references, we do not meet with a single chasm from the days of the original writers. Not to repeat what we have already made some allusion to, the testimonies of the original writers to one another, we proceed to assert, that some of the fathers whose writings have come down to us were the companions of the apostles, and are even named in the books of the New Testament. St. Clement, bishop of Rome, is, with the concurrence of all ancient authors, the same whom Paul mentions in his epistle to the Philippians. In his epistle to the church of Corinth, which was written in the name of the whole church of Rome, he refers to the first epistle of Paul to the former church. "Take into your hands the epistle of the blessed Paul the apostle." He then makes a quotation, which is to be found in Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians. Could Clement have done this to the Corinthians themselves had no such epistle been in existence? And is not this an undoubted testimony, not merely from the mouth of Clement, but on the part of the churches both of Rome and Corinth, to the authenticity of such an epistle? There are in this same epistle of Clement several quotations of the second kind, which confirm the existence of some other books of the New Testament; and a multitude of allusions or references of the third kind, to the writings of the evangelists, the Acts of the Apostles, and a great many of those epistles which have been admitted into the New Testament. We have similar testimonies from some more of the fathers, who lived and conversed with Jesus Christ. Besides many references of the second and third kind, we have also other instances of the same kind of testimony which Clement gave to St. Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians, than which nothing can be conceived more indisputable. Ignatius, writing to the church of Ephesus, takes notice of St. Paul's epistle to that church; and Polycarp, an immediate disciple of the apostles, makes the same express reference to St. Paul's epistle to the Philippians in a letter addressed

to the people. In carrying our attention down from the apostolical fathers, we follow an uninterrupted series of testimonies to the authenticity of the canonical Scriptures. They get more numerous and circumstantial as we proceed—a thing to be expected from the progress of Christianity, and the greater multitude of writers who came forward in its defence and illustration.

In pursuing the series of writers from the days of the apostles down to about 150 years after the publication of the pieces which make up the New Testament, we come to Tertullian, of whom Lardner says, “that there are perhaps more and longer quotations of the small volume of the New Testament, in this one Christian author, than of all the works of Cicero, though of so uncommon excellence for thought and style, in the writers of all characters for several ages.”

We feel ourselves exposed, in this part of our investigation, to the suspicion which adheres to every Christian testimony. We have already made some attempts to analyze that suspicion into its ingredients, and we conceive, that the circumstance of the Christians being an interested party, is only one, and not perhaps the principal, of these ingredients. At all events, this may be the proper place for disposing of that one ingredient, and for offering a few general observations on the strength of the Christian testimony.

In estimating the value of any testimony, there are two distinct objects of consideration; the person who gives the testimony, and the people to whom the testimony is addressed. It is quite needless to enlarge on the resources which, in the present instance, we derive from both these considerations, and how much each of them contributes to the triumph and solidity of the Christian argument. In as far as the people who give the testimony are concerned, how could they be mistaken in their account of the New Testament, when some of them lived in the same age with the original writers, and were their intimate acquaintances, and when

all of them had the benefit of an uncontrolled series of evidence, reaching down from the date of the earliest publications to their own times? Or, how can we suspect that they falsified, when there runs through their writings the same tone of plainness and sincerity, which is allowed to stamp the character of authenticity on other productions; and, above all, when, upon the strength even of heathen testimony, we conclude that many of them, by their sufferings and death, gave the highest evidence that man can give of his speaking under the influence of a real and honest conviction? In as far as the people who received the testimony are concerned, to what other circumstances can we ascribe their concurrence, than to the truth of that testimony? In what way was it possible to deceive them upon a point of general notoriety? The books of the New Testament are referred to by the ancient fathers, as writings generally known and respected by the Christians of that period. If they were obscure writings, or had no existence at the time, how can we account for the credit and authority of those fathers who appeal to them, and had the effrontery to insult their fellow Christians by a falsehood so palpable, and so easily detected? Allow them to be capable of this treachery, we have still to explain how the people came to be the dupes of so glaring an imposition; how they could be persuaded to give up every thing for a religion, whose teachers were so unprincipled as to deceive them, and so unwise as to commit themselves upon ground where it was impossible to elude discovery. Could Clement have dared to refer the people of Corinth to an epistle said to be received by themselves, and which had no existence? or could he have referred the Christians at large to writings which they never heard of? And it was not enough to maintain the semblance of truth with the people, of their own party.

Where were the Jews all the time? and how was it possible to escape the correction of these keen and

vigilant observers ? We mistake the matter much, if we think that Christianity at that time was making its insidious way in silence and in secrecy, through a listless and unconcerned public. All history gives an opposite representation. The passions and curiosity of men were quite upon the alert. The popular enthusiasm had been excited on both sides of the question. It had drawn the attention of established authorities in different provinces of the empire, and the merits of the Christian cause had become a matter of frequent and formal discussion in courts of judicature. If, in these circumstances, the Christian writers had the hardihood to venture upon a falsehood, it would have been upon safer ground than what they actually adopted. They would never have hazarded to assert what was so open to contradiction, as the existence of books held in reverence among all the churches, and which nobody either in or out of these churches ever heard of. They would never have been so unwise as to commit in this way a cause, which had not a single circumstance to recommend it but its truth and its evidences.

The falsehood of the Christian testimony on this point would carry along with it a concurrence of circumstances, each of which is the strangest and most unprecedented that ever was heard of. First, That men, who sustained in their writings all the characters of sincerity, and many of whom submitted to martyrdom, as the highest pledge of sincerity which can possibly be given, should have been capable of falsehood at all. Second, That this tendency to falsehood should have been exercised so unwisely as to appear in an assertion perfectly open to detection, and which could be so readily converted to the discredit of that religion which it was the favourite ambition of their lives to promote and establish in the world. Third, That this testimony could have gained the concurrence of the people to whom it was addressed, and that, with their eyes perfectly open to its falsehood, they should be ready to make the sacrifice of life and of fortune in

supporting it. Fourth, That this testimony should never have been contradicted by the Jews, and that they should have neglected so effectual an opportunity of disgracing a religion, the progress of which they contemplated with so much jealousy and alarm. Add to this, that it is not the testimony of one writer which we are making to pass through the ordeal of so many difficulties. It is the testimony of many writers, who lived at different times and in different countries, and who add the very singular circumstance, of their entire agreement with one another, to the other circumstances, equally unaccountable, which we have just now enumerated. The falsehood of their united testimony is not to be conceived. It is a supposition which we are warranted to condemn, upon the strength of any one of the above improbabilities taken separately. But the fair way of estimating their effect upon the argument is to take them jointly, and in the language of the doctrine of chances, to take the product of all the improbabilities into one another. The argument which this product furnishes for the truth of the Christian testimony, has, in strength and conclusiveness, no parallel in the whole compass of ancient literature.

The testimony of Celsus is looked upon as peculiarly valuable, because it is disinterested. But if this consideration gives so much weight to the testimony of Celsus, why should so much doubt and suspicion annex to the testimony of Christian writers, several of whom, before his time, have given a fuller and more express testimony to the authenticity of the gospels? In the persecutions they sustained; in the obvious tone of sincerity and honesty which runs through their writings; in their general agreement upon this subject; in the multitude of their followers, who never could have confided in men that ventured to commit themselves, by the assertion of what was obviously and notoriously false; in the check which the vigilance, both of Jews and heathens, exercised over every Chris-

tian writer of that period,—in all these circumstances, they give every evidence of having delivered a fair and unpolliuted testimony.

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### CHAPTER III.

*On the internal Marks of Truth and Honesty to be found in the New Testament.*

II. **WE** shall now look into the New Testament itself, and endeavour to lay before the reader the internal marks of truth and honesty which are to be found in it.

Under this head, it may be right to insist upon the minute accuracy which runs through all its allusions to the existing manners and circumstances of the times. To appreciate the force of this argument, it would be right to attend to the peculiar situation of Judea at the time of our Saviour. It was then under the dominion of the Roman emperors, and comes frequently under the notice of the profane historians of that period. From this source we derive a great variety of information, as to the manner in which the emperors conducted the government of the different provinces; what degree of indulgence was allowed to the religious opinions of the people whom they held in subjection; in how far they were suffered to live under the administration of their own laws; the power which was vested in the presidents of provinces; and a number of other circumstances relative to the criminal and civil jurisprudence of that period. In this way, there is a great number of different points in which the historians of the New Testament can be brought into comparison with the secular historians of the age. The history of Christ and his apostles contains innumerable references to the state of public affairs. It is not the history of obscure and unnoticed individuals. They had attracted much of the public attention. They had been before

the governors of the country. They had passed through the established forms of justice; and some of them underwent the trial and punishment of the times. It is easy to perceive, then, that the New Testament writers were led to allude to a number of these circumstances in the political history and constitution of the times, which came under the cognizance of ordinary historians. This was delicate ground for an inventor to tread upon; and particularly, if he lived at an age subsequent to the time of his history. He might in this case have fabricated a tale, by confining himself to the obscure and familiar incidents of private history; but it is only for a true and a contemporary historian to sustain a continued accuracy through his minute and numerous allusions to the public policy and government of the times.

Within the period of the gospel history, Judea experienced a good many vicissitudes in the state of its government. At one time it formed part of a kingdom under Herod the Great. At another, it formed part of a smaller government under Archelaus. It after this came under the direct administration of a Roman governor; which form was again interrupted for several years by the elevation of Herod Agrippa to the sovereign power, as exercised by his grandfather; and it is at last left in the form of a province at the conclusion of the evangelical history. There were also frequent changes in the political state of the countries adjacent to Judea, and which are often alluded to in the New Testament. A caprice of the reigning emperor often gave rise to a new form of government, and a new distribution of territory. It will be readily conceived how much these perpetual fluctuations in the state of public affairs, both in Judea and its neighbourhood, must add to the power and difficulty of that ordeal to which the gospel history has been subjected.

On this part of the subject, there is no want of witnesses with whom to confront the writers of the New Testament. In addition to the Roman writers who



have touched upon the affairs of Judea, we have the benefit of a Jewish historian, who has given us a professed history of his own country. From him, as was to be expected, we have a far greater quantity of copious and detailed narrative, relative to the internal affairs of Judea, to the manners of the people, and those particulars which are connected with their religious belief and ecclesiastical constitution. With many, it will be supposed to add to the value of his testimony, that he was not a Christian; but that, on the other hand, we have every reason to believe him to have been a most zealous and determined enemy to the cause. It is really a most useful exercise, to pursue the harmony which subsists between the writers of the New Testament and those Jewish and profane authors with whom we bring them into comparison. Throughout the whole examination, our attention is confined to forms of justice; successions of governors in different provinces; manners and political institutions. We are therefore apt to forget the sacredness of the subject; and we appeal to all, who have prosecuted this inquiry, if this circumstance is not favourable to their having a closer and more decided impression of the truth of the gospel history. By instituting a comparison between the evangelists and contemporary authors, and restricting our attention to those points which come under the cognizance of ordinary history, we put the apostles and evangelists on the footing of ordinary historians; and it is for those who have actually undergone the labour of this examination to tell how much this circumstance adds to the impression of their authenticity. The mind gets emancipated from the peculiar delusion which attaches to the sacredness of the subject, and which has the undoubted effect of restraining the confidence of its inquiries. The argument assumes a secular complexion, and the writers of the New Testament are restored to that credit with which the reader delivers himself up to any other historian, who has a much less weight and quantity of historical evidence in his favour.

We refer those readers who wish to prosecute this inquiry, to the first volume of Lardner's *Credibility of the Gospels*. We shall restrict ourselves to a few general observations on the nature and precise effect of the argument.

In the first place, the accuracy of the numerous allusions to the circumstances of that period, which the gospel history embraces, forms a strong corroboration of that antiquity, which we have already assigned to its writers from external testimony. It amounts to a proof, that it is the production of authors who lived antecedent to the destruction of Jerusalem, and consequently about the time that is ascribed to them by all the external testimony which has already been insisted upon. It is that accuracy which could only be maintained by a contemporary historian. It would be difficult, even for the author of some general speculation, not to betray his time by some occasional allusion to the ephemeral customs and institutions of the period in which he wrote. But the authors of the New Testament run a much greater risk. There are five different pieces of that collection which are purely historical, and where there is a continued reference to the characters, and politics, and passing events of the day. The destruction of Jerusalem swept away the whole fabric of Jewish polity; and it is not to be conceived, that the memory of a future generation could have retained that minute, that varied, that intimate acquaintance with the statistics of a nation no longer in existence, which is evinced in every page of the evangelical writers. We find, in point of fact, that both the heathen and Christian writers of subsequent ages do often betray their ignorance of the particular customs which obtained in Judea during the time of our Saviour. And it must be esteemed a strong circumstance in favour of the antiquity of the New Testament, that on a subject in which the chances of detection are so numerous, and where we can scarcely advance a single step in the narrative without the possibility of betraying

our time by some mistaken allusion, it stands distinguished from every later composition, in being able to bear the most minute and intimate comparison with the contemporary historians of that period.

The argument derives great additional strength from viewing the New Testament, not as one single performance, but as a collection of several performances. It is the work of no less than eight different authors, who wrote without any appearance of concert, who published in different parts of the world, and whose writings possess every evidence, both internal and external, of being independent productions. Had only one author exhibited the same minute accuracy of allusion, it would have been esteemed a very strong evidence of its antiquity. But when we see so many authors exhibiting such a well-sustained and almost unexpected accuracy through the whole of their varied and distinct narratives, it seems difficult to avoid the conclusion, that they were either the eyewitnesses of their own history, or lived about the period of its accomplishment.

When different historians undertake the affairs of the same period, they either derive their information from one another, or proceed upon distinct and independent information of their own. Now it is not difficult to distinguish the copyist from the original historian. There is something in the very style and manner of an original narrative which announces its pretensions. It is not possible that any one event, or any series of events, should make such a similar impression upon two witnesses as to dispose them to relate it in the same language, to describe it in the same order, to form the same estimate as to the circumstances which should be noticed as important, and those other circumstances which should be suppressed as immaterial. Each witness tells the thing in his own way, makes use of his own language, and brings forward circumstances which the other might omit altogether, as not essential to the purpose of his narrative. It is this agreement in the facts, with this variety in the

manner of describing them, that never fails to impress upon the inquirer that additional conviction which arises from the concurrence of separate and independent testimonies. Now this is precisely that kind of coincidence which subsists between the New Testament writers and Josephus, in their allusions to the peculiar customs and institutions of that age. Each party maintains the style of original and independent historians. The one often omits altogether, or makes only a slight and distant allusion to what occupies a prominent part in the composition of the other. There is not the slightest vestige of any thing like a studied coincidence between them. There is variety, but no opposition; and it says much for the authenticity of both histories, that the most scrupulous and attentive criticism can scarcely detect a single example of an apparent contradiction in the testimony of these different authors, which does not admit of a likely, or at least a plausible reconciliation.

When the difference between two historians is carried to the length of a contradiction, it enfeebles the credit of both their testimonies. When the agreement is carried to the length of a close and scrupulous resemblance in every particular, it destroys the credit of one of the parties as an independent historian. In the case before us, we neither perceive this difference, nor this agreement. Such are the variations, that, at first sight, the reader is alarmed with the appearance of very serious and embarrassing difficulties. And such is the actual coincidence, that the difficulties vanish when we apply to them the labours of a profound and intelligent criticism. Had it been the object of the gospel writers to trick out a plausible imposition on the credulity of the world, they would have studied a closer resemblance to the existing authorities of that period; nor would they have laid themselves open to the superficial brilliancy of Voltaire, which dazzles every imagination, and reposed their vindication with the Lelands and Lardners of a distant posterity, whose

sober erudition is so little attended to, and which so few know how to appreciate.

In the gospels we are told that Herod, the Tetrarch of Galilee, married his brother Philip's wife. In Josephus we have the same story; only he gives a different name to Philip, and calls him Herod; and what adds to the difficulty, there was a Philip of that family, whom we know not to have been the first husband of Herodias. This is at first sight a little alarming. But, in the progress of our inquiries, we are given to understand from this same Josephus, that there were three Herods of the same family, and therefore no improbability in there being two Philips. We also know, from the histories of that period, that it was quite common for the same individual to have two names; and this is never more necessary, than when employed to distinguish brothers who have one name the same. The Herod who is called Philip, is just as likely a distinction as Simon who is called Peter, or Saul who is called Paul. The name of the high-priest, at the time of our Saviour's crucifixion, was Caiaphas, according to the evangelists. According to Josephus, the name of the high-priest at that period was Joseph. This would have been precisely a difficulty of the same kind, had not Josephus happened to mention that this Joseph was also called Caiaphas. Would it have been dealing fairly with the evangelists, we ask, to have made their credibility depend upon the accidental omission of another historian? Is it consistent with any acknowledged principle of sound criticism, to bring four writers so entirely under the tribunal of Josephus, each of whom stands as firmly supported by all the evidences which can give authority to an historian; and who have greatly the advantage of him in this, that they can add the argument of their concurrence to the argument of each separate and independent testimony? It so happens, however, in the present instance, that even Jewish writers, in their narrative of the same circumstance, give the name of Philip to the first husband of Herodias.

We by no means conceive that any foreign testimony was necessary for the vindication of the evangelists. Still, however, it must go far to dissipate every suspicion of artifice in the construction of their histories. It proves, that in the confidence with which they delivered themselves up to their own information, they neglected appearance, and felt themselves independent of it. This apparent difficulty, like many others of the same kind, lands us in a stronger confirmation of the honesty of the evangelists; and it is delightful to perceive, how truth receives a fuller accession to its splendour from the attempts which are made to disgrace and to darken it.

On this branch of the argument, the impartial inquirer must be struck with the little indulgence which infidels, and even Christians, have given to the evangelical writers. In other cases, when we compare the narratives of contemporary historians, it is not expected that all the circumstances alluded to by one will be taken notice of by the rest; and it often happens, that an event or a custom is admitted upon the faith of a single historian; and the silence of all other writers is not suffered to attach suspicion or discredit his testimony. It is an allowed principle, that a scrupulous resemblance between two histories is very far from necessary to their being held consistent with one another. And, what is more, it sometimes happens, that with contemporary historians there may be an apparent contradiction, and the credit of both parties remain as entire and unsuspicious as before. Posterity is in these cases disposed to make the most liberal allowances. Instead of calling it a contradiction, they often call it a difficulty. They are sensible, that in many instances, a seeming variety of statement has, upon a more extensive knowledge of ancient history, admitted of a perfect reconciliation. Instead, then, of referring the difficulty in question to the inaccuracy or bad faith of any of the parties, they, with more justness and more modesty, refer it to their own ignorance, and to that

obscurity which necessarily hangs over the history of every remote age. These principles are suffered to have great influence in every secular investigation; but so soon as, instead of a secular, it becomes a sacred investigation, every ordinary principle is abandoned, and the suspicion annexed to the teachers of religion is carried to the dereliction of all that candour and liberality with which every other document of antiquity is judged of and appreciated. How does it happen, that the authority of Josephus should be acquiesced in as a first principle, while every step in the narrative of the evangelists must have foreign testimony to confirm and support it? How comes it that the silence of Josephus should be construed into an impeachment of the testimony of the evangelists, while it is never admitted, for a single moment, that the silence of the evangelists can impart the slightest blemish to the testimony of Josephus? How comes it that the supposition of two Philips in one family should throw a damp of skepticism over the gospel narrative, while the only circumstance which renders that supposition necessary is the single testimony of Josephus; in which very testimony it is necessarily implied that there are two Herods in the same family? How comes it, that the evangelists, with as much internal, and a vast deal more of external evidence in their favour, should be made to stand before Josephus, like so many prisoners at the bar of justice? In any other case, we are convinced that this would be looked upon as *rough handling*. But we are not sorry for it. It has given more triumph and confidence to the argument. And it is no small addition to our faith, that its first teachers have survived an examination which, in point of rigour and severity, we believe to be quite unexampled in the annals of criticism.

It is always looked upon as a favourable presumption when a story is told circumstantially. The art and the safety of an impostor is to confine his narrative to generals, and not to commit himself by too minute a specification of time and place, and allusion to the manners

or occurrences of the day. The more of circumstance that we introduce into a story, we multiply the chances of detection, if false; and therefore, where a great deal of circumstance is introduced, it proves, that the narrator feels the confidence of truth, and labours under no apprehension for the fate of his narrative. Even though we have it not in our power to verify the truth of a single circumstance, yet the mere property of a story being circumstantial is always felt to carry an evidence in its favour. It imparts a more familiar air of life and reality to the narrative. It is easy to believe that the groundwork of a story may be a fabrication; but it requires a more refined species of imposture than we can well conceive, to construct a harmonious and well-sustained narrative, abounding in minute and circumstantial details which support one another, and where, with all our experience of real life, we can detect nothing misplaced, or inconsistent, or improbable.

To prosecute this argument in all its extent, it would be necessary to present the reader with a complete analysis or examination of the gospel history. But the most superficial observer cannot fail to perceive that it maintains, in a very high degree, the character of being a circumstantial narrative. When a miracle is recorded, we have generally the name of the town or neighbourhood where it happened; the names of the people concerned; the effect upon the hearts and convictions of the by-standers; the arguments and examinations it gave birth to; and all that minuteness of reference and description which impresses a strong character of reality upon the whole history. If we take along with us the time at which this history made its appearance, the argument becomes much stronger.—It does not merely carry a presumption in its favour, from being a circumstantial history:—it carries a proof in its favour, because these circumstances were completely within the reach and examination of those to whom it was addressed. Had the evangelists been false historians, they would not have committed themselves upon so



many particulars. They would not have furnished the vigilant inquirers of that period with such an effectual instrument for bringing them into discredit with the people; nor foolishly supplied, in every page of their narrative, so many materials for a cross-examination, which would infallibly have disgraced them.

Now we of this age can institute the same cross-examination. We can compare the evangelical writers with contemporary authors, and verify a number of circumstances in the history, and government, and peculiar economy of the Jewish people. We therefore have it in our power to institute a cross-examination upon the writers of the New Testament; and the freedom and frequency of their allusions to these circumstances supply us with ample materials for it. The fact, that they are borne out in their minute and incidental allusions by the testimony of other historians, gives a strong weight of what has been called circumstantial evidence in their favour. As a specimen of the argument, let us confine our observations to the history of our Saviour's trial, and execution, and burial. They brought him to Pontius Pilate. We know both from Tacitus and Josephus, that he was at that time governor of Judea. A sentence from him was necessary before they could proceed to the execution of Jesus; and we know that the power of life and death was usually vested in the Roman governor. Our Saviour was treated with derision; and this we know to have been a customary practice at that time, previous to the execution of criminals, and during the time of it. Pilate scourged Jesus before he gave him up to be crucified. We know from ancient authors, that this was a very usual practice among the Romans. The account of an execution generally run in this form:—he was stripped, whipped, and beheaded or executed. According to the evangelists, his accusation was written on the top of the cross; and we learn from Suetonius and others, that the crime of a person to be executed was affixed to the instrument of his punishment. According

to the evangelists, this accusation was written in three different languages ; and we know from Josephus, that it was quite common in Jerusalem to have all public advertisements written in this manner. According to the evangelists, Jesus had to bear his cross ; and we know from other resources of information, that this was the constant practice of these times. According to the evangelists, the body of Jesus was given up to be buried at the request of friends. We know that, unless the criminal was infamous, this was the law or the custom with all Roman governors.

These, and a few more particulars of the same kind, occur within the compass of a single page of the evangelical history. The circumstantial manner of the history affords a presumption in its favour, antecedent to all examination into the truth of the circumstances themselves. But it makes a strong addition to the evidence, when we find, that in all the subordinate parts of the main story, the evangelists maintain so great a consistency with the testimony of other authors, and with all we can collect from other sources of information, as to the manners and institutions of that period. It is difficult to conceive, in the first instance, how the inventor of a fabricated story would hazard such a number of circumstances, each of them supplying a point of comparison with other authors, and giving to the inquirer an additional chance of detecting the imposition. And it is still more difficult to believe, that truth should have been so artfully blended with falsehood in the composition of this narrative, particularly as we perceive nothing like a forced introduction of any one circumstance." There appears to be nothing out of place, nothing thrust in with the view of imparting an air of probability to the history. The circumstance upon which we bring the evangelists into comparison with profane authors, is often not intimated in a direct form, but in the form of a slight or distant allusion. There is not the most remote appearance of its being fetched or sought for. It is brought in accidentally, and flows

in the most natural and undesigned manner out of the progress of the narrative.

The circumstance, that none of the gospel writers are inconsistent with one another, falls better under a different branch of the argument. It is enough for our present purpose, that there is no single writer inconsistent with himself. It often happens, that falsehood carries its own refutation along with it; and that, through the artful disguises which are employed in the construction of a fabricated story, we can often detect a flaw or a contradiction, which condemns the authority of the whole narrative. Now, every single piece of the New Testament wants this mark or character of falsehood. The different parts are found to sustain, and harmonize, and flow out of each other. Each has at least the merit of being a consistent narrative. For any thing we see upon the face of it, it may be true, and a further hearing must be given before we can be justified in rejecting it as the tale of an impostor.

There is another mark of falsehood which each of the gospel narratives appear to be exempted from. There is little or no parading about their own integrity. We can collect their pretensions to credit from the history itself, but we see no anxious display of these pretensions. We cannot fail to perceive the force of that argument which is derived from the publicity of the Christian miracles, and the very minute and scrupulous examination which they had to sustain from the rulers and official men of Judea. But this publicity, and these examinations, are simply recorded by the evangelists. There is no boastful reference to these circumstances, and no ostentatious display of the advantage which they give to the Christian argument. They bring their story forward in the shape of a direct and unincumbered narrative, and deliver themselves with that simplicity and unembarrassed confidence, which nothing but their consciousness of truth, and the perfect feeling of their own strength and consistency, can account for. They do not write as if their object was

to carry a point that was at all doubtful or suspicious. It is simply to transmit to the men of other times, and of other countries, a memorial of the events which led to the establishment of the Christian religion in the world. In the prosecution of their narrative, we challenge the most refined judge of the human character to point out a single symptom of diffidence in the truth of their own story, or of art to cloak this diffidence from the notice of the most severe and vigilant observers. The manner of the New Testament writers does not carry in it the slightest idea of its being an assumed manner. It is quite natural, quite unguarded, and free of all apprehension that their story is to meet with any discredit or contradiction from any of those numerous readers who had it fully in their power to verify or to expose it. We see no expedient made use of to obtain or to conciliate the acquiescence of their readers. They appear to feel as if they did not need it. They deliver what they have to say in a round and unvarnished manner; nor is it in general accompanied with any of those strong asseverations by which an impostor so often attempts to practise upon the credulity of his victims.

In the simple narrative of the evangelists, they betray no feeling of wonder at the extraordinary nature of the events which they record, and no consciousness that what they are announcing is to excite any wonder among their readers. This appears to us to be a very strong circumstance. Had it been the newly-broached tale of an impostor, he would, in all likelihood, have feigned astonishment himself, or at least have laid his account with the doubt and astonishment of those to whom it was addressed. When a person tells a wonderful story to a company who are totally unacquainted with it, he must be sensible, not merely of the surprise which is excited in the minds of the hearers, but of a corresponding sympathy in his own mind with the feelings of those who listen to him. He lays his account with the wonder, if not the incredulity, of his hearers;

and this distinctly appears in the terms with which he delivers his story, and the manner in which he introduces it. It makes a wide difference, if, on the other hand, he tells the same story to a company who have long been apprized of the chief circumstances, but who listen to him for the mere purpose of obtaining a more distinct and particular narrative. Now, in as far as we can collect from the manner of the evangelists, they stand in this last predicament. They do not write as if they were imposing a novelty upon their readers. In the language of Luke, they write for the sake of giving more distinct information; and that the readers *might know the certainty of those things wherein they had been instructed*. In the prosecution of this task, they deliver themselves with the most familiar and unembarrassed simplicity. They do not appear to anticipate the surprise of their readers, or to be at all aware that the marvellous nature of their story is to be any obstacle to its credit or reception in the neighbourhood. At the first performance of our Saviour's miracles, there was a strong and a widely spread sensation over the whole country. *His fame went abroad, and all people were amazed*. This is quite natural; and the circumstance of no surprise being either felt or anticipated by the evangelists, in the writing of their history, can best be accounted for by the truth of the history itself, that the experience of years had blunted the edge of novelty, and rendered miracles familiar, not only to them, but to all the people to whom they addressed themselves.

What appears to us a most striking internal evidence for the truth of the gospel, is that perfect unity of mind and of purpose which is ascribed to our Saviour. Had he been an impostor, he could not have foreseen all the fluctuations of his history, and yet no expression of surprise is recorded to have escaped from him. No event appears to have caught him unprepared. We see no shifting of doctrine or sentiment, with a view to accommodate to new or unexpected circumstances.

His parables and warnings to his disciples give sufficient intimation that he laid his account with all those events which appeared to his unenlightened friends to be so untoward and so unpromising. In every explanation of his objects, we see the perfect consistency of a mind before whose prophetic eye all futurity lay open; and when the events of this futurity came round, he met them, not as chances that were unforeseen, but as certainties which he had provided for. This consistency of his views is supported through all the variations of his history, and it stands finely contrasted in the record of the evangelists, with the misconceptions, the surprises, the disappointments of his followers. The gradual progress of their minds from the splendid anticipations of earthly grandeur to a full acquiescence in the doctrine of a crucified Saviour, throws a stronger light on the perfect unity of purpose and of conception which animated his, and which can only be accounted for by the inspiration that filled and enlightened it. It may have been possible enough to describe a well-sustained example of this contrast from an actual history before us. It is difficult, however, to conceive how it could be sustained so well, and in a manner so apparently artless, by means of invention, and particularly when the inventors made their own errors and their own ignorance form part of the fabrication.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### *On the Testimony of the Original Witnesses to the Truth of the Gospel Narrative.*

III. THERE was nothing in the situation of the New Testament writers which leads us to perceive that they had any possible inducement for publishing a falsehood.

We have not to allege the mere testimony of the Christian writers, for the danger to which the profession of Christianity exposed all its adherents at that

period. We have the testimony of Tacitus to this effect. We have innumerable illusions, or express intimations, of the same circumstance in the Roman historians. The treatment and persecution of the Christians make a principal figure in the affairs of the empire; and there is no point better established in ancient history, than that the bare circumstance of being a Christian brought many to the punishment of death, and exposed all to the danger of a suffering the most appalling and repulsive to the feelings of our nature.

It is not difficult to perceive why the Roman government, in its treatment of Christians, departed from its usual principles of toleration. We know it to have been their uniform practice to allow every indulgence to the religious belief of those different countries in which they established themselves. The truth is, that such an indulgence demanded of them no exertion of moderation or principle. It was quite consonant with the spirit of paganism. A different country worshipped different gods, but it was a general principle of paganism, that each country had its gods, to which the inhabitants of that country owed their peculiar homage and veneration. In this way there was no interference between the different religions which prevailed in the world. It fell in with the policy of the Roman government to allow the fullest toleration to other religions, and it demanded no sacrifice of principle. It was even a dictate of principle with them to respect the gods of other countries; and the violation of a religion different from their own, seems to have been felt, not merely as a departure from policy or justice, but to be viewed with the same sentiment of horror which is annexed to blasphemy or sacrilege. So long as we were under paganism, the truth of one religion did not involve in it the falsehood or rejection of another. In respecting the religion of another country, we did not abandon our own; nor did it follow, that the inhabitants of that other country annexed any contempt or discredit to the religion in which we had

been educated. In this mutual reverence for the religion of each other, no principle was departed from, and no object of veneration abandoned. It did not involve in it the denial or relinquishment of our own gods, but only the addition of so many more gods to our catalogue.

In this respect, however, the Jews stood distinguished from every other people within the limits of the Roman empire. Their religious belief carried in it something more than attachment to their own system. It carried in it the contempt and detestation of every other. Yet, in spite of this circumstance, their religion was protected by the mild and equitable toleration of the Roman government. The truth is, that there was nothing in the habits or character of the Jews which was calculated to give much disturbance to the establishments of other countries. Though they admitted converts from other nations, yet their spirit of proselytism was far from being of that active or adventurous kind, which could alarm the Roman government for the safety of any existing institutions. Their high and exclusive veneration for their own system gave an unsocial disdain to the Jewish character, which was not at all inviting to foreigners; but still, as it led to nothing mischievous in point of effect, it seems to have been overlooked by the Roman government as a piece of impotent vanity.

But the case was widely different with the Christian system. It did not confine itself to the denial or rejection of every other system. It was for imposing its own exclusive authority over the consciences of all, and for detaching as many as it could from their allegiance to the religion of their own country. It carried on its forehead all the offensive characters of a monopoly, and not merely excited resentment by the supposed arrogance of its pretensions, but from the rapidity and extent of its innovations, spread an alarm over the whole Roman empire for the security of all its establishments. Accordingly, at the commencement of its



progress, so long as it was confined to Judea and the immediate neighbourhood, it seems to have been in perfect safety from the persecution of the Roman government. It was at first looked upon as a mere modification of Judaism, and that the first Christians differed from the rest of their countrymen only *in certain questions of their own superstition*. For a few years after the crucifixion of our Saviour, it seems to have excited no alarm on the part of the Roman emperors, who did not depart from their usual maxims of toleration till they began to understand the magnitude of its pretensions, and the unlooked for success which attended them.

In the course of a very few years after its first promulgation, it drew upon it the hostility of the Roman government; and the fact is undoubted, that some of its first teachers, who announced themselves to be the companions of our Saviour, and the eyewitnesses of the remarkable events in his history, suffered martyrdom for their adherence to the religion which they taught.

The disposition of the Jews to the religion of Jesus was no less hostile; and it manifested itself at a still earlier stage of the business. The causes of this hostility are obvious to all who are in the slightest degree conversant with the history of those times. It is true, that the Jews did not at all times possess the power of life and death; nor was it competent for them to bring the Christians to execution by the exercise of legal authority. Still, however, their powers of mischief were considerable. Their wishes had always a certain control over the measures of the Roman governor; and we know that it was this control which was the means of extorting from Pilate the unrighteous sentence by which the very first teacher of our religion was brought to a cruel and ignominious death. We also know, that under Herod Agrippa the power of life and death was vested in a Jewish sovereign, and that this power was actually exerted against the most dis-

tinguished Christians of that time. Add to this, that the Jews had, at all times, the power of inflicting the lesser punishments. They could whip, they could imprison. Besides all this, the Christians had to brave the phrensy of an enraged multitude; and some of them actually suffered martyrdom in the violence of the popular commotions.

Nothing is more evident than the utter disgrace which was annexed by the world at large to the profession of Christianity at that period. Tacitus calls it "*superstitio exitiabilis*," and accuses the Christians of enmity to mankind. By Epictetus and others, their heroism is termed obstinacy, and it was generally treated by the Roman governors as the infatuation of a miserable and despised people. There was none of that glory annexed to it which blazes around the martyrdom of a patriot or a philosopher. That constancy which, in another case, would have made them illustrious, was held to be a contemptible folly, which only exposed them to the derision and insolence of the multitude. A name and a reputation in the world might sustain the dying moments of Socrates or Regulus; but what earthly principles can account for the intrepidity of those poor and miserable outcasts, who consigned themselves to a voluntary martyrdom in the cause of their religion?

Having premised these observations, we offer the following alternative to the mind of every candid inquirer. The first Christians either delivered a sincere testimony, or they imposed a story upon the world which they knew to be a fabrication.

The persecutions to which the first Christians voluntarily exposed themselves compel us to adopt the first part of the alternative. It is not to be conceived that a man would resign fortune, and character, and life, in the assertion of what he knew to be a falsehood. The first Christians must have believed their story to be true; and it only remains to prove, that if they believed it to be true, it must be true indeed.

A voluntary martyrdom must be looked upon as the highest possible evidence which it is in the power of man to give of his sincerity. The martyrdom of Socrates has never been questioned as an undeniable proof of the sincere devotion of his mind to the principles of that philosophy for which he suffered. The death of Archbishop Cranmer will be allowed by all to be a decisive evidence of his sincere rejection of what he conceived to be the errors of popery, and his thorough conviction in the truth of the opposite system. When the council of Geneva burnt Servetus, no one will question the sincerity of the latter's belief, however much he may question the truth of it. Now, in all these cases, the proof goes no farther than to establish the sincerity of the martyr's belief. It goes but a little way, indeed, in establishing the justness of it. This is a different question. A man may be mistaken, though he be sincere. His errors, if they are not seen to be such, will exercise all the influence and authority of truth over him. Martyrs have bled on the opposite sides of the question. It is impossible, then, to rest on this circumstance as an argument for the truth of either system; but the argument is always deemed incontrovertible, in as far as it goes to establish the sincerity of each of the parties, and that both died in the firm conviction of the doctrines which they professed.

Now, the martyrdom of the first Christians stands distinguished from all other examples by this circumstance, that it not merely proves the sincerity of the martyr's belief, but it also proves that what he believed was true. In other cases of martyrdom, the sufferer, when he lays down his life, gives his testimony to the truth of an opinion. In the case of the Christians, when they laid down their lives, they gave their testimony to the truth of a fact of which they affirmed themselves to be the eye and the ear witnesses. The sincerity of both testimonies is unquestionable; but it is only in the latter case that the truth of the testimony follows as a necessary consequence of its sincerity.

An opinion comes under the cognizance of the understanding, ever liable, as we all know, to error and delusion. A fact comes under the cognizance of the senses, which have ever been esteemed as infallible, when they give their testimony to such plain, and obvious, and palpable appearances as those which make up the evangelical story. We are still at liberty to question the philosophy of Socrates, or the orthodoxy of Cranmer and Servetus; but if we were told by a Christian teacher in the solemnity of his dying hour, and with the dreadful apparatus of martyrdom before him, that he saw Jesus after he had risen from the dead; that he conversed with him many days; that he put his hand into the print of his sides; and, in the ardour of his joyful conviction, exclaimed, "My Lord, and my God!" we should feel that there was no truth in the world, did this language and this testimony deceive us.

If Christianity be not true, then the first Christians must have been mistaken as to the subject of their testimony. This supposition is destroyed by the nature of the subject. It was not testimony to a doctrine which might deceive the understanding. It was something more than testimony to a dream, or a trance, or a midnight fancy, which might deceive the imagination. It was testimony to a multitude and a succession of palpable facts, which could never have deceived the senses, and which preclude all possibility of mistake, even though it had been the testimony only of one individual. But when, in addition to this, we consider, that it is the testimony, not of one, but of many individuals; that it is a story repeated in a variety of forms, but substantially the same; that it is the concurring testimony of different eyewitnesses, or the companions of eyewitnesses—we may, after this, take refuge in the idea of falsehood and collusion; but it is not to be admitted, that these eight different writers of the New Testament could have all blundered the matter with such method, and such uniformity.

We know that, in spite of the magnitude of their sufferings, there are infidels, who, driven from the first part of the alternative, have recurred to the second, and have affirmed, that the glory of establishing a new religion induced the first Christians to assert, and to persist in asserting, what they knew to be a falsehood. But (though we should be anticipating the last branch of the argument) they forget that we have the concurrence of two parties to the truth of Christianity, and that it is the conduct only of one of the parties which can be accounted for by the supposition in question. The two parties are the teachers and the taught. The former may aspire to the glory of founding a new faith; but what glory did the latter propose to themselves from being the dupes of an imposition so ruinous to every earthly interest, and held in such low and disgraceful estimation by the world at large? Abandon the teachers of Christianity to every imputation which infidelity, on the rack for conjectures to give plausibility to its system, can desire, how shall we explain the concurrence of its disciples? There may be a glory in leading, but we see no glory in being led. If Christianity were false, and Paul had the effrontery to appeal to his five hundred living witnesses, whom he alleges to have seen Christ after his resurrection, the submissive acquiescence of his disciples remains a very inexplicable circumstance. The same Paul, in his epistles to the Corinthians, tells them that some of them had the gift of healing, and the power of working miracles; and that the signs of an apostle had been wrought among them in wonders and mighty deeds. A man aspiring to the glory of an accredited teacher would never have committed himself on a subject where his falsehood could have been so readily exposed. And in the veneration with which we know his epistles to have been preserved by the church of Corinth, we have not merely the testimony of their writer to the truth of the Christian miracles, but the

testimony of a whole people, who had no interest in being deceived.

Had Christianity been false, the reputation of its first teachers lay at the mercy of every individual among the numerous proselytes which they had gained to their system. It may not be competent for an unlettered peasant to detect the absurdity of a doctrine; but he can at all times lift his testimony against a fact said to have happened in his presence, and under the observation of his senses. Now it so happens, that in a number of the epistles, there are allusions to, or express intimations of, the miracles that had been wrought in the different churches to which these epistles are addressed. How comes it, if it be all a fabrication, that it was never exposed? We knew, that some of the disciples were driven, by the terrors of persecuting violence, to resign their profession. How should it happen that none of them ever attempted to vindicate their apostacy by laying open the artifice and insincerity of their Christian teachers? We may be sure that such a testimony would have been highly acceptable to the existing authorities of that period. The Jews would have made the most of it; and the vigilant and discerning officers of the Roman government would not have failed to turn it to account. The mystery would have been exposed and laid open, and the curiosity of latter ages would have been satisfied as to the wonderful and unaccountable steps by which a religion could make such head in the world, though it rested its whole authority on facts, the falsehood of which was accessible to all who were at the trouble to inquire about them. But no! We hear of no such testimony from the apostates of that period. We read of some who, agonized at the reflection of their treachery, returned to their first profession, and expiated, by martyrdom, the guilt which they felt they had incurred by their dereliction of the truth. This furnishes a strong example of the power of conviction, and when we join with it, that it is conviction in the integrity of those teachers who appealed to mi-

racles which had been wrought among them, it appears to us a testimony in favour of our religion which is altogether irresistible.

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## CHAPTER V.

### *On the Testimony of subsequent Witnesses.*

IV. But this brings us to the last division of the argument, viz. that the leading facts in the history of the gospel are corroborated by the testimony of others.

The evidence we have already brought forward for the antiquity of the New Testament, and the veneration in which it was held from the earliest ages of the church, is an implied testimony of all the Christians of that period to the truth of the gospel history. By proving the authenticity of St. Paul's epistles to the Corinthians, we not merely establish his testimony to the truth of the Christian miracles,—we establish the additional testimony of the whole church of Corinth, who would never have respected these epistles, if Paul had ventured upon a falsehood so open to detection, as the assertion, that miracles were wrought among them, which not a single individual ever witnessed. By proving the authenticity of the New Testament at large, we secure, not merely that argument, which is founded on the testimony and concurrence of its different writers, but also the testimony of those immense multitudes, who, in distant countries, submitted to the New Testament as a rule of their faith. The testimony of the teachers, whether we take into consideration the subject of that testimony, or the circumstances under which it was delivered, is of itself a stronger argument for the truth of the gospel history, than can be alleged for the truth of any other history which has been transmitted down to us from ancient times. The concurrence of the taught carries along with it a host of additional testi-

monies, which gives an evidence to the evangelical story, that is altogether unexampled. On a point of ordinary history, the testimony of Tacitus is held decisive, because it is not contradicted. The history of the New Testament is not only not contradicted, but confirmed by the strongest possible expressions which men can give of their acquiescence in its truth; by thousands who were either agents or eyewitnesses of the transactions recorded, who could not be deceived, who had no interest and no glory to gain by supporting a falsehood, and who, by their sufferings in the cause of what they professed to be their belief, gave the highest evidence that human nature can give of sincerity.

In this circumstance, it may be perceived how much the evidence for Christianity goes beyond all ordinary historical evidence. A profane historian relates a series of events which happen in a particular age; and we count it well, if it be his own age, and if the history which he gives us be the testimony of a contemporary author. Another historian succeeds him at the distance of years, and, by repeating the same story, gives the additional evidence of his testimony to its truth. A third historian perhaps goes over the same ground, and lends another confirmation to the history. And it is thus, by collecting all the lights which are thinly scattered over the tract of ages and of centuries, that we obtain all the evidence which can be got, and all the evidence that is generally wished for.

Now, there is room for a thousand presumptions, which, if admitted, would overturn the whole of this evidence. For any thing we know, the first historian may have had some interest in disguising the truth, or substituting in its place a falsehood, and a fabrication. True, it has not been contradicted, but they form a very small number of men, who feel strongly or particularly interested in a question of history. The literary and speculative men of that age may have perhaps been engaged in other pursuits, or their testimonies



may have perished in the wreck of centuries. The second historian may have been so far removed in point of time from the events of his narratives, that he can furnish us, not with an independent, but with a derived testimony. He may have copied his account from the original historian, and the falsehood have come down to us in the shape of an authentic and well-attested history. Presumptions may be multiplied without end; yet, in spite of them, there is a natural confidence in the veracity of man, which disposes us to as firm a belief in many of the facts of ancient history, as in the occurrences of the present day.

The history of the gospel, however, stands distinguished from all other history by the uninterrupted nature of its testimony, which carries down its evidence, without a chasm, from its earliest promulgation to the present day. We do not speak of the superior weight and splendour of its evidences, at the first publication of that history, as being supported, not merely by the testimony of one, but by the concurrence of several independent witnesses. We do not speak of its subsequent writers, who follow one another in a far closer and more crowded train, than there is any other example of in the history or literature of the world. We speak of the strong, though unwritten testimony of its numerous proselytes, who, in the very fact of their proselytism, give the strongest possible confirmation to the gospel, and fill up every chasm in the recorded evidence of past times.

In the written testimonies for the truth of the Christian religion, Barnabas comes next in order to the first promulgators of the evangelical story. He was a contemporary of the apostles, and writes a very few years after the publication of the pieces which make up the New Testament. Clement follows, who was a fellow-labourer of Paul, and writes an epistle, in the name of the church of Rome, to the church of Corinth. The written testimonies follow one another with a closeness and a rapidity of which there is no example; but what

we insist on at present, is the unwritten and implied testimony of the people who composed these two churches. There can be no fact better established, than that these two churches were planted in the days of the apostles, and that the epistles which were respectively addressed to them were held in the utmost authority and veneration. There is no doubt that the leading facts of the gospel history were familiar to them; that it was in the power of many individuals amongst them to verify these facts, either by their own personal observation, or by an actual conversation with eyewitnesses; and that, in particular, it was in the power of almost every individual in the church of Corinth, either to verify the miracles which St. Paul alludes to in his epistle to that church, or to detect and expose the imposition, had there been no foundation for such an allusion. What do we see in all this, but the strongest possible testimony of a whole people to the truth of the Christian miracles? There is nothing like this in common history,—the formation of a society, which can only be explained by the history of the gospel, and where the conduct of every individual furnishes a distinct pledge and evidence of its truth. And to have a full view of the argument, we must reflect, that it is not one, but many societies, scattered over the different countries of the world; that the principle upon which each society was formed, was the divine authority of Christ and his apostles, resting upon the recorded miracles of the New Testament; that these miracles were wrought with a publicity, and at a nearness of time, which rendered them accessible to the inquiries of all, for upwards of half a century; that nothing but the power of conviction could have induced the people of that age to embrace a religion so disgraced and so persecuted; that every temptation was held out for its disciples to abandon it; and that though some of them, overpowered by the terrors of punishment, were driven to apostacy, yet not one of them has left us a testimony which can impeach the

miracles of Christianity, or the integrity of its first teachers.

It may be observed, that in pursuing the line of continuity from the days of the apostles, the written testimonies for the truth of the Christian miracles follow one another in closer succession than we have any other example of in ancient history. But what gives such peculiar and unprecedented evidence to the history of the gospel is, that in the concurrence of the multitudes who embraced it, and in the existence of those numerous churches and societies of men who espoused the profession of the Christian faith, we cannot but perceive, that every small interval of time between the written testimonies of authors is filled up by materials so strong and so firmly cemented, as to present us with an unbroken chain of evidence, carrying as much authority along with it, as if it had been a diurnal record, commencing from the days of the apostles, and authenticated through its whole progress by the testimony of thousands.

Every convert to the Christian faith in those days gives one additional testimony to the truth of the gospel history. Is he a Gentile? The sincerity of his testimony is approved by the persecutions, the sufferings, the danger, and often the certainty of martyrdom, which the profession of Christianity incurred. Is he a Jew? The sincerity of his testimony is approved by all these evidences, and in addition to them by this well known fact, that the faith and doctrine of Christianity were in the highest degree repugnant to the wishes and prejudices of that people. It ought never to be forgotten, that in as far as Jews are concerned, Christianity does not owe a single proselyte to its doctrines, but to the power and credit of its evidences, and that Judea was the chief theatre on which these evidences were exhibited. It cannot be too often repeated, that these evidences rest, not upon arguments, but upon facts; and that the time, and the place, and the circumstances rendered these facts accessible to the

inquiries of all who chose to be at the trouble of this examination. And there can be no doubt that this trouble was taken, whether we reflect on the nature of the Christian faith, as being so offensive to the pride and bigotry of the Jewish people, or whether we reflect on the consequences of embracing it, which were derision, and hatred, and banishment, and death. We may be sure, that a step which involved in it such painful sacrifices, would not be entered into upon light and insufficient grounds. In the sacrifices they made, the Jewish converts gave every evidence of having delivered an honest testimony in favour of the Christian miracles; and when we reflect that many of them must have been eyewitnesses, and all of them had it in their power to verify these miracles by conversation and correspondence with by-standers, there can be no doubt that it was not merely an honest, but a competent testimony. There is no fact better established than that many thousands among the Jews believed in Jesus and his apostles; and we have therefore to allege their conversion, as a strong additional confirmation to the written testimony of the original historians.

One of the popular objections against the truth of the Christian miracles, is the general infidelity of the Jewish people. We are convinced, that at the moment of proposing this objection, an actual delusion exists in the mind of the infidel. In this conception, the Jews and the Christians stand opposed to each other. In the belief of the latter, he sees nothing but a party or an interested testimony, and in the unbelief of the former, he sees a whole people persevering in their ancient faith, and resisting the new faith on the ground of its insufficient evidences. He forgets all the while, that the testimony of a great many of these Christians is in fact the testimony of Jews. He only attends to them in their present capacity. He contemplates them in the light of Christians, and annexes to them all that suspicion and incredulity which are generally annexed to the testimony of an interested party. He is aware

of what they are at present, Christians and defenders of Christianity: but he has lost sight of their original situation, and is totally unmindful of this circumstance, that in their transition from Judaism to Christianity, they have given him the very evidence he is in quest of. Had another thousand of these Jews renounced the faith of their ancestors, and embraced the religion of Jesus, they would have been equivalent to a thousand additional testimonies in favour of Christianity, and testimonies too of the strongest and most unsuspecting kind, that can well be imagined. But this evidence would make no impression on the mind of an infidel, and the strength of it is disguised, even from the eyes of the Christian. These thousand, in the moment of their conversion, lose the appellation of Jews, and merge into the name and distinction of Christians. The Jews, though diminished in number, retain the national appellation; and the obstinacy with which they persevere in the belief of their ancestors, is still looked upon as the adverse testimony of an entire people. So long as one of that people continues a Jew, his testimony is looked upon as a serious impediment in the way of Christian evidences. But the moment he becomes a Christian, his motives are contemplated with distrust. He is one of the obnoxious and suspected party. The mind carries a reference only to what he is, and not to what he has been. It overlooks the change of sentiment, and forgets, that, in the renunciation of old habits and old prejudices, in defiance to sufferings and disgrace, in attachment to a religion so repugnant to the pride and bigotry of their nation, and above all, in submission to a system of doctrines which rested its authority on the miracles of their own time, and their own remembrance, every Jewish convert gives the most decisive testimony which man can give for the truth and divinity of our religion.

But why then, says the infidel, did they not all believe? Had the miracles of the gospel been true, we

do not see how human nature could have held out against an evidence so striking and so extraordinary; nor can we at all enter into the obstinacy of that belief which is ascribed to the majority of the Jewish people, and which led them to shut their eyes against a testimony that no man of common sense could have resisted.

Many Christian writers have attempted to resolve this difficulty, and to prove that the infidelity of the Jews, in spite of the miracles which they saw, is perfectly consistent with the known principles of human nature. For this purpose they have enlarged, with much force and plausibility, on the strength and inveteracy of the Jewish prejudices—on the bewildering influence of religious bigotry upon the understanding of men—on the woful disappointment which Christianity offered to the pride and interest of the nation—on the selfishness of the priesthood—and on the facility with which they might turn a blind and fanatical multitude, who had been trained, by their earliest habits, to follow and to revere them.

In the gospel history itself, we have a very consistent account at least of the Jewish opposition to the claims of our Saviour. We see the deeply wounded pride of a nation, that felt itself disgraced by the loss of its independence. We see the arrogance of its peculiar and exclusive claims to the favour of the Almighty. We see the anticipation of a great prince, who was to deliver them from the power and subjection of their enemies. We see their insolent contempt for the people of other countries, and the foulest scorn that they should be admitted to an equality with themselves in the honours and benefits of a revelation from heaven. We may easily conceive, how much the doctrine of Christ and his apostles was calculated to gall, and irritate, and disappoint them; how it must have mortified their national vanity; how it must have alarmed the jealousy of an artful and interested priesthood; and how it must have scandalized the great body of the people, by the liberality with which it ad-

dressed itself to all men, and to all nations, and raised to an elevation with themselves, those whom the firmest habits and prejudices of their country had led them to contemplate under all the disgrace and ignominy of outcasts.

Accordingly, we know, in fact, that bitterness, and resentment, and wounded pride lay at the bottom of a great deal of the opposition which Christianity experienced from the Jewish people. In the New Testament history itself, we see repeated examples of their outrageous violence; and this is confirmed by the testimony of many other writers. In the history of the martyrdom of Polycarp, it is stated, that the Gentiles and Jews inhabiting Smyrna, in a furious rage, and with a loud voice, cried out, "This is the teacher of Asia, the father of the Christians, the destroyer of our gods, who teaches all men not to sacrifice, nor to worship them!" They collected wood, and the dried branches of trees for his pile; and it is added, "the Jews also, according to custom, assisting with the greatest forwardness." It is needless to multiply testimonies to a point so generally understood; as, that it was not conviction alone, which lay at the bottom of their opposition to the Christians; that a great deal of passion entered into it; and that their numerous acts of hostility against the worshippers of Jesus carry in them all the marks of fury and resentment.

Now we know that the power of passion will often carry it very far over the power of conviction. We know that the strength of conviction is not in proportion to the quantity of evidence *presented*, but to the quantity of evidence *attended to*, and perceived in consequence of that attention. We also know, that attention is, in a great measure, a voluntary act; and that it is often in the power of the mind, both to turn away its attention from what would land it in any painful or humiliating conclusion, and to deliver itself up exclusively to those arguments which flatter its taste and its prejudices. All this lies within the range

of familiar and every-day experience. We all know how much it ensures the success of an argument, when it gets a *favourable* hearing. In by far the greater number of instances, the parties in a litigation are not merely each *attached* to their own side of the question ; but each *confident and believing* that theirs is the side on which justice lies. In those contests of opinion, which take place every day between man and man, and particularly if passion and interest have any share in the controversy, it is evident to the slightest observation, that though it might have been selfishness, in the first instance, which gave a peculiar direction to the understanding, yet each of the parties often comes, at last, to entertain a sincere conviction in the truth of his own argument. It is not that truth is not one and immutable. The whole difference lies in the observers ; each of them viewing the object through the medium of his own prejudices, or cherishing those peculiar habits of attention and understanding to which taste or inclination had disposed him.

In addition to all this, we know, that though the evidence for a particular truth be so glaring that it forces itself upon the understanding, and all the sophistry of passion and interest cannot withstand it ; yet if this truth be of a very painful and humiliating kind, the obstinacy of man will often dispose him to resist its influence, and in the bitterness of his malignant feelings, to carry a hostility against it, and that too in proportion to the weight of the argument which may be brought forward in its favour.

Now, if we take into account the inveteracy of the Jewish prejudices, and reflect how unpalatable and how mortifying to their pride must have been the doctrine of a crucified Saviour ; we believe that their conduct, in reference to Christianity and its miraculous evidences, presents us with nothing anomalous or inexplicable, and that it will appear a possible and a likely thing to every understanding, that has been much cultivated in the experience of human affairs, in



the nature of mind, and in the science of its character and phenomena.

There is a difficulty, however, in the way of this investigation. From the nature of the case, it bears no resemblance to any thing else that has either been recorded in history, or has come within the range of our own personal observation. There is no other example of a people called upon to renounce the darling faith and principles of their country, and that upon the authority of miracles exhibited before them. All the experience we have about the operation of prejudice, and the perverseness of the human temper and understanding, cannot afford a complete solution of the question. In many respects, it is a case *sui generis*, and the only creditable information which we can obtain to enlighten us in this inquiry, is through the medium of that very testimony upon which the difficulty in question has thrown the suspicion that we want to get rid of.

Let us give all the weight to this argument of which it is susceptible, and the following is the precise degree in which it affects the merits of the controversy. When the religion of Jesus was promulgated in Judea, its first teachers appealed to miracles wrought by themselves in the face of day, as the evidence of their being commissioned by God. Many adopted the new religion upon this appeal, and many rejected it. An argument in favour of Christianity is derived from the conduct of the first. An objection against Christianity is derived from the conduct of the second. Now, allowing that we are not in possession of experience enough for estimating, in *absolute terms*, the strength of the objection, we propose the following as a solid and unexceptionable principle, upon which to estimate a comparison between the strength of the objection and the strength of the argument. We are sure that the first would not have embraced Christianity had its miracles been false; but we are not sure beforehand, whether the second would have rejected this religion

on the supposition of the miracles being true. If experience does not enlighten us as to how far the exhibition of a real miracle would be effectual in inducing men to renounce their old and favourite opinions, we can infer nothing decisive from the conduct of those who still kept by the Jewish religion. This conduct was a matter of uncertainty, and any argument which may be extracted from it cannot be depended upon. But the case is widely different with that party of their nation who were converted from Judaism to Christianity. We know that the alleged miracles of Christianity were perfectly open to examination. We are sure, from our experience of human nature, that in a question so interesting, this examination would be given. We know, from the very nature of the miraculous facts, so remote from every thing like what would be attempted by jugglery, or pretended to by enthusiasm, that, if this examination were given, it would fix the truth or falsehood of the miracles. The truth of these miracles, then, for any thing we know, may be consistent with the conduct of the Jewish party; but the falsehood of these miracles, from all that we do know of human nature, is not consistent with the conduct of the Christian party. Granting that we are not sure whether a miracle would force the Jewish nation to renounce their opinions, all that we can say of the conduct of the Jewish party is, that we are not able to explain it. But there is one thing that we are sure of. We are sure, that if the pretensions of Christianity be false, it never could have forced any part of the Jewish nation to renounce their opinions, with its alleged miracles, so open to detection, and its doctrines so offensive to every individual. The conduct of the Christian party, then, is not only what we are able to explain, but we can say with certainty, that it admits of no other explanation than the truth of that hypothesis which we contend for. We may not know in how far an attachment to existing opinions will prevail over an argument which is felt to be true; but we

are sure, that this attachment will never give way to an argument which is perceived to be false; and particularly when danger, and hatred, and persecution are the consequences of embracing it. The argument for Christianity, from the conduct of the first proselytes, rests upon the firm ground of experience. The objection against it, from the conduct of the unbelieving Jews, has no experience whatever to rest upon.

The conduct of the Jews may be considered as a solitary fact in the history of the world, not from its being an exception to the general principles of human nature, but from its being an exhibition of human nature in singular circumstances. We have no experience to guide us in our opinion as to the probability of his conduct; and nothing, therefore, that can impeach a testimony which all experience in human affairs leads us to repose in as unquestionable. But after this testimony is admitted, we may submit to be enlightened by it; and in the history which it gives us of the unbelieving Jews, it furnishes a curious fact as to the power of prejudice upon the human mind, and a valuable accession to what we before knew of the principles of our nature. It lays before us an exhibition of the human mind in a situation altogether unexampled, and furnishes us with the result of a singular experiment, if we may so call it, in the history of the species. We offer it as an interesting fact to the moral and intellectual philosopher, that a previous attachment may sway the mind even against the impression of a miracle; and those who believe not in the historical evidence which established the authority of Christ and of the apostles, would not believe even though one rose from the dead.

We are inclined to think, that the argument has come down to us in the best possible form, and that it would have been enfeebled by that very circumstance which the infidel demands as essential to its validity. Suppose for a moment that we could give him what he wants, that all the priests and people of

Judea were so borne down by the resistless evidence of miracles, as by one universal consent to become the disciples of the new religion. What interpretation might have been given to this unanimous movement in favour of Christianity? A very unfavourable one, we apprehend, to the authenticity of its evidences. Will the infidel say, that he has a higher respect for the credibility of those miracles which ushered in the dispensation of Moses, because they were exhibited in the face of a whole people, and gained their unexcepted submission to the laws and the ritual of Judaism? This new revolution would have received the same explanation. We would have heard of its being sanctioned by their prophecies, of its being agreeable to their prejudices, of its being supported by the countenance and encouragement of their priesthood, and that the jugglery of its miracles imposed upon all, because all were willing to be deceived by them. The actual form in which the history has come down, presents us with an argument free of all these exceptions. We, in the first instance, behold a number of proselytes, whose testimony to the facts of Christianity is approved of by what they lost and suffered in the maintenance of their faith; and we, in the second instance, behold a number of enemies, eager, vigilant, and exasperated at the progress of the new religion, who have not questioned the authenticity of our histories, and whose silence, as to the public and widely talked of miracles of Christ and his apostles, we have a right to interpret into the most triumphant of all testimonies.

The same process of reasoning is applicable to the case of the Gentiles. Many adopted the new religion, and many rejected it. We may not be sure, if we can give an adequate explanation of the conduct of the latter on the supposition that the evidences are true; but we are perfectly sure that we can give no adequate explanation of the conduct of the former on the supposition that the evidences are false. For any thing we

know, it is possible that the one party may have adhered to their former prejudices, in opposition to all the force and urgency of argument which even an authentic miracle carries along with it. But we know that it is not possible that the other party should renounce these prejudices, and that too in the face of danger and persecution, unless the miracles had been authentic. So great is the difference between the strength of the argument and the strength of the objection, that we count it fortunate for the merits of the cause that the conversions to Christianity were partial. We, in this way, secure all the support which is derived from the inexplicable fact of the silence of its enemies, inexplicable on every supposition but the undeniable evidence and certainty of the miracles. Had the Roman empire made a unanimous movement to the new religion, and all the authorities of the state lent their concurrence to it, there would have been a suspicion annexed to the whole history of the gospel which cannot at present apply to it; and from the collision of the opposite parties the truth has come down to us in a far more unquestionable form than if no such collision had been excited.

The silence of heathen and Jewish writers of that period about the miracles of Christianity has been much insisted upon by the enemies of our religion; and has even excited something like a painful suspicion in the breasts of those who are attached to its cause. Certain it is that no ancient facts have come down to us supported by a greater quantity of historical evidence, and better accompanied with all the circumstances which can confer credibility on that evidence. When we demand the testimony of Tacitus to the Christian miracles, we forget all the while that we can allege a multitude of much more decisive testimonies; no less than eight contemporary authors, and a train of succeeding writers who follow one another with a closeness and a rapidity of which there is no example in any other department of ancient history. We for-

get that the authenticity of these different writers, and their pretensions to credit, are founded on considerations perfectly the same in kind, though much stronger in degree, than what have been employed to establish the testimony of the most esteemed historians of former ages. For the history of the gospel we behold a series of testimonies, more continuous, and more firmly sustained, than there is any other example of in the whole compass of erudition. And to refuse this evidence is a proof that in this investigation there is an aptitude in the human mind to abandon all ordinary principles, and to be carried away by the delusions which we have already insisted on.

But let us try the effect of that testimony which our antagonists demand. Tacitus has actually attested the existence of Jesus Christ; the reality of such a personage; his public execution under the administration of Pontius Pilate; the temporary check which this gave to the progress of his religion; its revival a short time after his death; its progress over the land of Judea, and to Rome itself, the metropolis of the empire;—all this we have in a Roman historian; and, in opposition to all established reasoning upon these subjects, it is by some more firmly confided in upon his testimony, than upon the numerous and concurring testimonies of nearer and contemporary writers. But be this as it may, let us suppose that Tacitus had thrown one particular more into his testimony, and that his sentence had run thus: “They had their denomination from Christus, who, in the reign of Tiberius, was put to death as a criminal by the procurator Pontius Pilate, *and who rose from the dead on the third day after his execution, and ascended into heaven.*” Does it not strike everybody that however true the last piece of information may be, and however well established by its proper historians, this is not the place where we can expect to find it? If Tacitus did not believe the resurrection of our Saviour (which is probably the case, as he never, in all likelihood, paid any attention to the

evidence of a faith which he was led to regard, from the outset, as a pernicious superstition, and a mere modification of Judaism), it is not to be supposed that such an assertion could ever have been made by him. If Tacitus did believe the resurrection of our Saviour, he gives us an example of what appears not to have been uncommon in these ages—he gives us an example of a man adhering to that system which interest and education recommended, in opposition to the evidence of a miracle which he admitted to be true. Still, even on this supposition, it is the most unlikely thing in the world that he would have admitted the fact of our Saviour's resurrection into his history. It is most improbable that a testimony of this kind would have been given, even though the resurrection of Jesus Christ be admitted; and, therefore, the want of this testimony carries in it no argument that the resurrection is a falsehood. If, however, in opposition to all probability, this testimony had been given, it would have been appealed to as a most striking confirmation of the main fact of the evangelical history. It would have figured away in all our elementary treatises, and been referred to as a master argument in every exposition of the evidences of Christianity. Infidels would have been challenged to believe in it on the strength of their own favourite evidence; the evidence of a classical historian; and must have been at a loss how to dispose of this fact when they saw an unbiassed heathen giving his round and unqualified testimony in its favour.

Let us now carry the supposition a step farther. Let us conceive that Tacitus not only believed the fact, and gave his testimony to it, but that he believed it so far as to become a Christian: Is his testimony to be refused because he gives this evidence of its sincerity? Tacitus asserting the fact and remaining a heathen, is not so strong an argument for the truth of our Saviour's resurrection, as Tacitus asserting the fact and becoming a Christian in consequence of it. Yet the moment that this transition is made—a transition by which, in

point of fact, his testimony becomes stronger—in point of impression it becomes less; and, by a delusion, common to the infidel and the believer, the argument is held to be weakened by the very circumstance which imparts greater force to it. The elegant and accomplished scholar becomes a believer. The truth, the novelty, the importance of this new subject withdraw him from every other pursuit. He shares in the common enthusiasm of the cause, and gives all his talents and eloquence to the support of it. Instead of the Roman historian, Tacitus comes down to posterity in the shape of a Christian father, and the high authority of his name is lost in a crowd of similar testimonies.

A direct testimony to the miracles of the New Testament, from the mouth of a heathen, is not to be expected. We cannot satisfy this demand of the infidel; but we can give him a host of much stronger testimonies than he is in quest of—the testimonies of those men who were heathens, and who embraced a hazardous and a disgraceful profession, under a deep conviction of those facts to which they gave their testimony. "O, but you now land us in the testimony of Christians!" This is very true; but it is the very fact of their being Christians in which the strength of the argument lies: and in each of the numerous fathers of the Christian church, we see a stronger testimony than the required testimony of the heathen Tacitus. We see men who, if they had not been Christians, would have risen to as high an eminence as Tacitus in the literature of the times; and whose direct testimonies to the gospel history would, in that case, have been most impressive, even to the mind of an infidel. And are these testimonies to be less impressive because they were preceded by conviction, and sealed by martyrdom?

Yet though, from the nature of the case, no direct testimony to the Christian miracles from a heathen can be looked for, there are heathen testimonies which form an important accession to the Christian argument.



Such are the testimonies to the state of Judea ; the testimonies to those numerous particulars in government and customs which are so often alluded to in the New Testament, and give it the air of an authentic history ; and above all, the testimonies to the sufferings of the primitive Christians, from which we learn, through a channel clear of every suspicion, that Christianity, a religion of facts, was the object of persecution at a time when eyewitnesses taught and eyewitnesses must have bled for it.

The silence of Jewish and heathen writers, when the true interpretation is given to it, is all on the side of the Christian argument. Even though the miracles of the gospel had been believed to be true, it is most unlikely that the enemies of the Christian religion would have given their testimony to them ; and the absence of this testimony is no impeachment therefore upon the reality of these miracles. But if the miracles of the gospel had been believed to be false, it is most likely that this falsehood would have been asserted by the Jews and heathens of that period ; and the circumstance of no such assertion having been given, is a strong argument for the reality of these miracles. Their silence in not asserting the miracles is perfectly consistent with their truth ; but their silence in not denying them, is not at all consistent with their falsehood. The entire silence of Josephus upon the subject of Christianity, though he wrote after the destruction of Jerusalem, and gives us the history of that period in which Christ and his apostles lived, is certainly a very striking circumstance. The sudden progress of Christianity at that time, and the fame of its miracles (if not the miracles themselves), form an important part of the Jewish history. How came Josephus to abstain from every particular respecting it ? Will you reverse every principle of criticism, and make the silence of Josephus carry it over the positive testimony of the many historical documents which have come down to us ? If you refuse every Christian testimony

upon the subject, you will not refuse the testimony of Tacitus, who asserts, that this religion spread over Judea, and reached the city of Rome, and was looked upon as an evil of such importance, that it became the object of an authorized persecution by the Roman government; and all this several years before the destruction of Jerusalem, and before Josephus composed his history. Whatever opinion may be formed as to the *truth* of Christianity, certain it is, that its *progress* constituted an object of sufficient magnitude to compel the attention of any historian who undertook the affairs of that period. How then shall we account for the scrupulous and determined exclusion of it from the history of Josephus? Had its miracles been false, this Jewish historian would gladly have exposed them. But its miracles were true, and silence was the only refuge of an antagonist, and his wisest policy.

But though we gather no direct testimony from Josephus, yet his history furnishes us with many satisfying additions to the Christian argument. In the details of policy and manners, he coincides in the main with the writers of the New Testament; and these coincidences are so numerous, and have so undesigned an appearance, as to impress on every person, who is at the trouble of making the comparison, the truth of the evangelical story.

If we are to look for direct testimonies to the miracles of the New Testament, we must look to that quarter where alone it would be reasonable to expect them,—to the writings of the Christian fathers, men who were not Jews or heathens at the moment of recording their testimony; but who had been Jews or heathens, and who, in their transition to the ultimate state of Christians, give a stronger evidence of integrity, than if they had believed these miracles, and persisted in a cowardly adherence to the safest profession.

We do not undertake to satisfy every demand of the infidel. We think we do enough, if we prove that the

thing demanded is most unlikely, even though the miracles should be true; and therefore that the want of it carries no argument against the truth of the miracles. But we do still more than this, if we prove that the testimonies which we actually possess are much stronger than the testimonies he is in quest of. And who can doubt this, when he reflects, that the true way of putting the case between the testimony of the Christian father, which we do have, and the testimony of Tacitus, which we do not have, is that the latter would be an assertion not followed up by that conduct which would have been the best evidence of its sincerity; whereas the former is an assertion substantiated by the whole life, and by the decisive fact of the old profession having been renounced, and the new profession entered into—a change where disgrace, and danger, and martyrdom were the consequences?

Let us, therefore, enter into an examination of these testimonies.

This subject has been in part anticipated, when we treated of the authenticity of the books of the New Testament. We have quotations and references to those books from five apostolic fathers, the companions of the original writers. We have their testimonies sustained and extended by their immediate successors; and as we pursue the crowded series of testimonies downwards, they become so numerous and so explicit as to leave no doubt on the mind of the inquirers, that the different books of the New Testament are the publications of the authors whose names they bear; and were received by the Christian world as books of authority from the first period of their appearance.

Now, every sentence in a Christian father, expressive of respect for a book in the New Testament, is also expressive of his faith in its contents. It is equivalent to his testimony for the miracles recorded in it. In the language of the law, it is an act by which he homologates the record, and superinduces his own testi-

mony to that of the original writers. It would be vain to attempt speaking of all these testimonies. It cost the assiduous Lardner many years to collect them. They are exhibited in his *Credibility of the New Testament*; and in the multitude of them, we see a power and a variety of evidence for the Christian miracles which is quite unequalled in the whole compass of ancient history.

But in addition to these testimonies, in the gross, for the truth of the evangelical history, have we no distinct testimonies to the individual facts which compose it? We have no doubt of the fact, that Barnabas was acquainted with the gospel by Matthew, and that he subscribed to all the information contained in that history. This is a most valuable testimony from a contemporary writer; and a testimony which embraces all the miracles narrated by the evangelist. But, in addition to this, we should like if Barnabas, upon his own personal conviction, could assert the reality of any of these miracles. It would be multiplying the original testimonies; for he was a companion and a fellow-labourer of the apostles. We should have been delighted, if, in the course of our researches into the literature of past times, we had met with an authentic record, written by one of the five hundred that are said to have seen our Saviour after his resurrection, and adding his own narrative of this event to the narratives that have already come down to us. Now, is any thing of this kind to be met with in ecclesiastical antiquity? How much of this kind of evidence are we in actual possession of? and if we have not enough to satisfy our keen appetite for evidence on a question of such magnitude, how is the want of it to be accounted for?

Let it be observed, then, that of the twenty-seven books which make up the New Testament, five are narrative or historical, viz. the four gospels, and the Acts of the Apostles, which relate to the life and miracles of our Saviour, and the progress of his religion through the world, for a good many years after his as-

cension into heaven. All the rest, with the exception of the Revelation of St. John, are doctrinal or admonitory; and their main object is to explain the principles of the new religion, or to impress its duties upon the numerous proselytes who had even at that early period been gained over to the profession of Christianity.

Besides what we have in the New Testament, no other professed narrative of the miracles of Christianity has come down to us, bearing the marks of an authentic composition by any apostle, or any contemporary of the apostles. Now to those who regret this circumstance, we beg leave to submit the following observations. Suppose that one other narrative of the life and miracles of our Saviour had been composed, and to give all the value to this additional testimony of which it is susceptible, let us suppose it to be the work of an apostle. By this last circumstance, we secure to its uttermost extent the advantage of an original testimony, the testimony of another eyewitness, and constant companion of our Saviour. Now, we ask, what would have been the fate of this performance? It would have been incorporated into the New Testament along with the other gospels. It may have been the gospel according to Philip. It may have been the gospel according to Bartholomew. At all events, the whole amount of the advantage would have been the substitution of five gospels instead of four, and this addition, the want of which is so much complained of, would scarcely have been felt by the Christian, or acknowledged by the infidel, to strengthen the evidence of which we are already in possession.

But to vary the supposition, let us suppose that the narrative wanted, instead of being the work of an apostle, had been the work of some other contemporary, who writes upon his own original knowledge of the subject, but was not so closely associated with Christ, or his immediate disciples, as to have his history admitted into the canonical Scriptures. Had this history been preserved, it would have been transmitted to us

in a separate state; it would have stood out from among that collection of writings which passes under the general name of the New Testament, and the additional evidence thus afforded would have come down in the form most satisfactory to those with whom we are maintaining our present argument. Yet though, in point of form, the testimony might be more satisfactory; in point of fact it would be less so. It is the testimony of a less competent witness—a witness who, in the judgment of his contemporaries, wanted those accomplishments which entitled him to a place in the New Testament. There must be some delusion operating upon the understanding if we think that a circumstance which renders an historian less accredited in the eyes of his own age, should render him more accredited in the eyes of posterity. Had Mark been kept out of the New Testament, he would have come down to us in that form which would have made his testimony more impressive to a superficial inquirer; yet there would be no good reason for keeping him out but precisely that reason which should render his testimony less impressive. We do not complain of this anxiety for more evidence, and as much of it as possible; but it is right to be told that the evidence we have is of far more value than the evidence demanded, and that, in the concurrence of four canonical narratives, we see a far more effectual argument for the miracles of the New Testament, than in any number of those separate and extraneous narratives, the want of which is so much felt, and so much complained of.

That the New Testament is not one, but a collection of many testimonies, is what has been often said, and often acquiesced in. Yet even after the argument is formally acceded to, its impression is unfelt; and on this subject there is a great and an obstinate delusion, which not only confirms the infidel in his disregard to Christianity, but even veils the strength of the evidence from its warmest admirers.

There is a difference between a mere narrative and

a work of speculation or morality. The latter subjects embrace a wider range, admit a greater variety of illustration, and are quite endless in their application to the new cases that occur in the everchanging history of human affairs. The subject of a narrative again admits of being exhausted. It is limited by the number of actual events. True, you may expatiate upon the character or importance of these events, but, in so doing, you drop the office of a pure historian, for that of the politician, or the moralist, or the divine. The evangelists give us a very chaste and perfect example of the pure narrative. They never appear in their own persons, or arrest the progress of the history for a single moment by interposing their own wisdom, or their own piety. A gospel is a bare relation of what has been said or done; and it is evident that, after a few good compositions of this kind, any future attempts would be superfluous and uncalled for.

But, in point of fact, these attempts were made. It is to be supposed that, after the singular events of our Saviour's history, the curiosity of the public would be awakened, and there would be a demand for written accounts of such wonderful transactions. These written accounts were accordingly brought forward. Even in the interval of time between the ascension of our Saviour and the publication of the earliest gospel, such written histories seem to have been frequent. "Many," says St. Luke (and in this he is supported by the testimony of subsequent writers), "have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of these things." Now what has been the fate of all these performances? Such as might have been anticipated. They fell into disuse and oblivion. There is no evil design ascribed to the authors of them. They may have been written with perfect integrity, and been useful for a short time, and within a limited circle; but, as was natural, they all gave way to the superior authority and more complete information of our present narratives. The demand of the Christian world was

withdrawn from the less esteemed to the more esteemed histories of our Saviour. The former ceased to be read, and copies of them would be no longer transcribed or multiplied. We cannot find the testimony we are in quest of, not because it was never given, but because the early Christians, who were the most competent judges of that testimony, did not think it worthy of being transmitted to us.

But, though the number of narratives be necessarily limited by the nature of the subject, there is no such limitation upon works of a moral, didactic, or explanatory kind. Many such pieces have come down to us, both from the apostles themselves, and from the earlier fathers of the church. Now, though the object of these compositions is not to deliver any narrative of the Christian miracles, they may perhaps give us some occasional intimation of them. They may proceed upon their reality. We may gather, either from incidental passages, or from the general scope of the performance, that the miracles of Christ and his apostles were recognised, and the divinity of our religion acknowledged as founded upon these miracles.

The first piece of the kind with which we meet besides the writings of the New Testament, is an epistle ascribed to Barnabas, and, at all events, the production of a man who lived in the days of the apostles. It consists of an exhortation to constancy in the Christian profession, a dissuasive from Judaism, and other moral instructions. We shall only give a quotation of a single clause from this work. "And he (i. e. our Saviour) making great signs and prodigies to the people of the Jews, they neither believed nor loved him."

The next piece in the succession of Christian writers is the undoubted epistle of Clement, the bishop of Rome, to the church of Corinth, and who, by the concurrent voice of all antiquity, is the same Clement who is mentioned in the epistle to the Philippians, as the fellow-labourer of Paul. It is written in the name of the church of Rome, and the object of it is to com-



pose certain dissensions which had arisen in the church of Corinth. It was out of his way to enter into any thing like a formal narrative of the miraculous facts which are to be found in the evangelical history. The subject of his epistle did not lead him to this; and besides, the number and authority of the narratives already published rendered an attempt of this kind altogether superfluous. Still, however, though a miracle may not be formally announced, it may be brought in incidentally, or it may be proceeded upon, or assumed as the basis of an argument. We give one or two examples of this. In one part of his epistle he illustrates the doctrine of our resurrection from the dead by the change and progression of natural appearances, and he ushers in this illustration with the following sentence: "Let us consider, my beloved, how the Lord shows us our future resurrection perpetually, of which he made the Lord Jesus Christ the first fruits, by raising him from the dead." This incidental way of bringing in the fact of our Lord's resurrection appears to us the strongest possible form in which the testimony of Clement could have come down to us. It is brought forward in the most confident and unembarrassed manner. He does not stop to confirm this fact by any strong asseveration, nor does he carry, in his manner of announcing it, the most remote suspicion of its being resisted by the incredulity of those to whom he is addressing himself. It wears the air of an acknowledged truth; a thing understood and acquiesced in by all parties in this correspondence. The direct narrative of the evangelists give us their original testimony to the miracles of the gospel. The artless and indirect allusions of the apostolic fathers give us, not merely their faith in this testimony, but the faith of the whole societies to which they write. They let us see, not merely that such a testimony was given, but that such a testimony was generally believed, and that too at a time when the facts in question lay within the memory of living witnesses.

In another part, speaking of the apostles, Clement says, that "receiving the commandments, and being filled with full certainty by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and confirmed by the word of God, with the assurance of the Holy Spirit, they went out announcing the advent of the kingdom of God."

It was no object in those days for a Christian writer to come over the miracles of the New Testament, with the view of lending his formal and explicit testimony to them. This testimony had already been completed to the satisfaction of the whole Christian world. If much additional testimony has not been given, it is because it was not called for. But we ought to see that every Christian writer, in the fact of his being a Christian, in his expressed reverence for the books of the New Testament, and in his numerous allusions to the leading points of the gospel history, has given as satisfying evidence to the truth of the Christian miracles, as if he had left behind him a copious and distinct narrative.

Of all the miracles of the gospel it was to be supposed that the resurrection of our Saviour would be oftenest appealed to; not as an evidence of his being a teacher,—for that was a point so settled in the mind of every Christian that a written exposition of the argument was no longer necessary,—but as a motive to constancy in the Christian profession, and as the great pillar of hope in our own immortality. We accordingly meet with the most free and confident allusions to this fact in the early fathers. We meet with five intimations of this fact in the undoubted epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians: a father who had been educated by the apostles, and conversed with many who had seen Christ.

It is quite unnecessary to exhibit passages from the epistles of Ignatius to the same effect, or to pursue the examination downwards through the series of written testimonies. It is enough to announce it as a general fact that, in the very first age of the Christian church,

the teachers of this religion proceeded as confidently upon the reality of Christ's miracles and resurrection, in their addresses to the people, as the teachers of the present day: or, in other words, that they were as little afraid of being resisted by the incredulity of the people at a time when the evidence of the facts was accessible to all, and habit and prejudice were against them, as we are of being resisted by the incredulity of an unlettered multitude who listen to us with all the veneration of an hereditary faith.

There are five apostolic fathers, and a series of Christian writers who follow after them in rapid succession. To give an idea to those who are not conversant in the study of ecclesiastical antiquities, how well sustained the chain of testimony is from the first age of Christianity, we shall give a passage from a letter of Irenæus, preserved by Eusebius. We have no less than nine compositions from different authors, which fill up the interval between him and Polycarp; and yet this is the way in which he speaks, in his old age, of the venerable Polycarp, in a letter to Florinus. "I saw you, when I was very young, in the Lower Asia with Polycarp. For I better remember the affairs of that time than those which have lately happened; the things which we learn in our childhood growing up in the soul, and uniting themselves to it. Insomuch that I can tell the place in which the blessed Polycarp sat and taught, and his going out and coming in, and the manner of his life, and the form of his person, and his discourses to the people; and how he related his conversation with John, and others who had seen the Lord; and how he related their sayings, and what he had heard from them concerning the Lord, both concerning his miracles and his doctrines, as he had received them from the eyewitnesses of the Word of Life: all which Polycarp related agreeably to the Scriptures. These things I then, through the mercy of God towards me, diligently heard and attended to, recording them, not on paper, but upon my heart."

Now is the time to exhibit to full advantage the argument which the different epistles of the New Testament afford. They are, in fact, so many distinct and additional testimonies. If the testimonies drawn from the writings of the Christian fathers are calculated to make any impression, then the testimonies of these epistles, where there is no delusion, and no prejudice in the mind of the inquirer, must make a greater impression. They are more ancient, and were held to be of greater authority by competent judges. They were held sufficient by the men of those days who were nearer to the sources of evidence; and they ought, therefore, to be held sufficient by us. The early persecuted Christians had too great an interest in the grounds of their faith, to make a light and superficial examination. We may safely commit the decision to them; and the decision they have made is, that the authors of the different epistles in the New Testament were worthier of their confidence, as witnesses of the truth, than the authors of those compositions which were left out of the collection, and maintain, in our eye, the form of a separate testimony. By what unaccountable tendency is it, that we feel disposed to reverse this decision, and to repose more faith in the testimony of subsequent and less esteemed writers? Is there any thing in the confidence given to Peter and Paul by their contemporaries, which renders them unworthy of ours? or, is the testimony of their writings less valuable and less impressive, because the Christians of old have received them as the best vouchers of their faith?

It gives us a far more satisfying impression than ever of the truth of our religion, when, in addition to several distinct and independent narratives of its history, we meet with a number of contemporaneous productions addressed to different societies, and all proceeding upon the truth of that history, as an agreed and unquestionable point among the different parties in the correspondence. Had that history been a fabrication,

in what manner, we ask, would it have been followed up by the subsequent compositions of those numerous agents in the work of deception? How comes it that they have betrayed no symptom of that insecurity which it would have been so natural to feel in their circumstances? Through the whole of these epistles, we see nothing like the awkward or embarrassed air of impostors. We see no anxiety either to mend or to confirm the history that had already been given. We see no contest which they might have been called upon to maintain with the incredulity of their converts, as to the miracles of the Gospel. We see the most intrepid remonstrance against errors of conduct, or discipline, or doctrine. This savours strongly of upright and independent teachers; but is it not a most striking circumstance, that among the severe reckonings which St. Paul had with some of his churches, he was never once called upon to school their doubts, or their suspicions, as to the reality of the Christian miracles? This is a point universally acquiesced in; and, from the general strain of these epistles, we collect, not merely the testimony of their authors, but the unsuspected testimony of all to whom they addressed themselves.

And let it never be forgotten, that the Christians who composed these churches were in every way well qualified to be arbiters in this question. They had the first authorities within their reach. The five hundred who, Paul says to them, had seen our Saviour after his resurrection, could be sought after; and, if not to be found, Paul would have had his assertion to answer for. In some cases, they were the first authorities themselves, and had therefore no confirmation to go in search of. He appeals to the miracles which had been wrought among them, and in this way he commits the question to their own experience. He asserts this to the Galatians; and at the very time, too, that he is delivering against them a most severe and irritating invective. He intimates the same thing repeatedly to

the Corinthians; and after he had put his honesty to so severe a trial, does he betray any insecurity as to his character and reputation among them? So far from this, that in arguing the general doctrine of the resurrection from the dead, as the most effectual method of securing assent to it, he rests the main part of the argument upon their confidence in his fidelity as a witness. "But if there be no resurrection from the dead, then is Christ not risen.—Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God, that he raised up Christ, whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not." Where, we ask, would have been the mighty charm of this argument, if Paul's fidelity had been questioned; and how shall we account for the free and intrepid manner in which he advances it, if the miracles which he refers to, as wrought among them, had been nullities of his own invention?

For the truth of the gospel history, we can appeal to one strong and unbroken series of testimonies from the day of the apostles. But the great strength of the evidence lies in that effulgence of testimony, which enlightens this history at its commencement—in the number of its original witnesses,—in the distinct and independent records which they left behind them, and in the undoubted faith they bore among the numerous societies which they instituted. The concurrence of the apostolic fathers, and their immediate successors, forms a very strong and a very satisfying argument; but let it be further remembered, that out of the materials which compose, if we may be allowed the expression, the original charter of our faith, we can select a stronger body of evidence than it is possible to form out of the whole mass of subsequent testimonies.

## CHAPTER VI.

*Remarks on the Argument from Prophecy.*

VI. PROPHECY is another species of evidence to which Christianity professes an abundant claim, and which can be established on evidence altogether distinct from the testimony of its supporters. The prediction of what is future may not be delivered in terms so clear and intelligible as the history of what is past; and yet, in its actual fulfilment, it may leave no doubt on the mind of the inquirer that it was a prediction, and that the event in question was in the contemplation of him who uttered it. It may be easy to dispose of one isolated prophecy, by ascribing it to accident; but when we observe a number of these prophecies, delivered in different ages, and all bearing an application to the same events, or the same individual, it is difficult to resist the impression that they were actuated by a knowledge superior to human.

The obscurity of the prophetic language has been often complained of; but it is not so often attended to, that if the prophecy which foretels an event were as clear as the narrative which describes it, it would in many cases annihilate the argument. Were the history of any individual foretold in terms as explicit as it is in the power of narrative to make them, it might be competent for any usurper to set himself forward, and in as far as it depended upon his own agency, he might realize that history. He has no more to do than to take his lesson from the prophecy before him; but could it be said that fulfilment like this carried in it the evidence of any thing divine or miraculous? If the prophecy of a Prince and a Saviour, in the Old Testament, were different from what they are, and delivered in the precise and intelligible terms of an actual history; then every accomplishment which could be brought about by the agency of those who understood the prophecy, and were anxious for its verification, is lost to

the argument. It would be instantly said that the agents in the transaction took their clue from the prophecy before them. It is the way, in fact, in which infidels have attempted to evade the argument as it actually stands. In the New Testament, an event is sometimes said to happen, that *it might be fulfilled* what was spoken by some of the old prophets. If every event which enters into the Gospel had been under the control of agents merely human, and friends to Christianity, then we might have had reason to pronounce the whole history to be one continued process of artful and designed accommodation to the Old Testament prophecies. But the truth is, that many of the events pointed at in the Old Testament, so far from being brought about by the agency of Christians, were brought about in opposition to their most anxious wishes. Some of them were brought about by the agency of their most decided enemies; and some of them, such as the dissolution of the Jewish state, and the dispersion of its people among all countries, were quite beyond the control of the apostles and their followers, and were effected by the intervention of a neutral party, which at the time took no interest in the question, and which was a stranger to the prophecy, though the unconscious instrument of its fulfilment.

Lord Bolinbroke has carried the objection so far, that he asserts Jesus Christ to have brought about his own death by a series of wilful and preconcerted measures, merely to give the disciples who came after him the triumph of an appeal to the old prophecies. This is ridiculous enough; but it serves to show with what facility an infidel might have evaded the whole argument, had these prophecies been free of all that obscurity which is now so loudly complained of.

The best form, for the purposes of argument, in which a prophecy can be delivered, is to be so obscure, as to leave the event, or rather its main circumstances, unintelligible before the fulfilment, and so clear as to be intelligible after it. It is easy to conceive that this



may be an attainable object ; and it is saying much for the argument as it stands, that the happiest illustrations of this clearness on the one hand, and this obscurity on the other, are to be gathered from the actual prophecies of the Old Testament.

It is not, however, by this part of the argument, that we expect to reclaim the enemy of our religion from his infidelity ; not that the examination would not satisfy him, but that the examination will not be given. What a violence it would be offering to all his antipathies, were we to land him, at the outset of our discussions, among the chapters of Daniel or Isaiah ! He has too inveterate a contempt for the Bible. He nauseates the whole subject too strongly to be prevailed upon to accompany us to such an exercise. On such a subject as this, there is no contact, no approximation between us ; and we therefore leave him with the assertion (an assertion which he has no title to pronounce upon, till after he has finished the very examination in which we are most anxious to engage him), that in the numerous prophecies of the Old Testament, there is such a multitude of allusions to the events of the New, as will give a strong impression to the mind of every inquirer, that the whole forms one magnificent series of communications between the visible and the invisible world ; a great plan over which the unseen God presides in wisdom, and which, beginning with the first ages of the world, is still receiving new developments from every great step in the history of the species.

It is impossible to give a complete exposition of this argument without an actual reference to the prophecies themselves ; and this we at present abstain from. But it can be conceived, that a prophecy, when first announced, may be so obscure as to be unintelligible in many of its circumstances ; and yet may so far explain itself by its accomplishment, as to carry along with it the most decisive evidence of its being a prophecy. And the argument may be so far strengthened by the number, and distance, and inde-

pendence of the different prophecies, all bearing an application to the same individual and the same history, as to leave no doubt on the mind of the observer, that the events in question were in the actual contemplation of those who uttered the prediction. If the terms of the prophecy were not comprehended, it at least takes off the suspicion of the event being brought about by the control or agency of men who were interested in the accomplishment. If the prophecies of the Old Testament are just invested in such a degree of obscurity as is enough to disguise many of the leading circumstances from those who lived before the fulfilment,—while they derive from the event an explanation satisfying to all who live after it, then, we say, the argument for the divinity of the whole is stronger than if no such obscurity had existed. In the history of the New Testament, we see a natural and consistent account of the delusion respecting the Messiah, in which this obscurity has left the Jewish people; of the strong prejudices, even of the first disciples; of the manner in which these prejudices were dissipated, only by the accomplishment; and of their final conviction in the import of these prophecies being at last so strong, that it often forms their main argument for the divinity of that new religion which they were commissioned to publish to the world. Now, assuming, what we still persist in asserting, and ask to be tried upon, that an actual comparison of the prophecies in the Old Testament, with their alleged fulfilment in the New will leave a conviction behind it, that there is a real correspondence between them; we see, in the great events of the new dispensation brought about by the blind instrumentality of prejudice and opposition, far more unambiguous characters of the finger of God, than if every thing had happened with the full concurrence and anticipation of the different actors in this history.

There is another essential part of the argument, which is much strengthened by this obscurity. It is necessary to fix the date of the prophecies, or to esta-

blish, at least, that the time of their publication was antecedent to the events to which they refer. Now, had these prophecies been delivered in terms so explicit as to force the concurrence of the whole Jewish nation, the argument for their antiquity would not have come down in a form as satisfying as that in which it is actually exhibited. The testimony of the Jews, to the date of their sacred writings, would have been refused as an interested testimony. Whereas, to evade the argument as it stands, we must admit a principle; which, in no question of ordinary criticism, would be suffered for a single moment to influence your understanding. We must conceive that two parties, at the very time that they were influenced by the strongest mutual hostility, combined to support a fabrication; that they have not violated this combination; that the numerous writers on both sides of the question have not suffered the slightest hint of this mysterious compact to escape them; and that, though the Jews are galled incessantly by the triumphant tone of the Christian appeals to their own prophecies, they have never been tempted to let out a secret, which would have brought the argument of the Christians into disgrace, and show the world how falsehood and forgery mingled with their pretensions.

In the rivalry which, from the very commencement of our religion, has always obtained between Jews and Christians, in the mutual animosities of Christian sects, in the vast multiplication of copies of the Scriptures, in the distant and independent societies which were scattered over so many countries, we see the most satisfying pledge, both for the integrity of the sacred writings, and for the date which all parties agree in ascribing to them. We hear of the many securities which have been provided in the various forms of registrations, and duplicates, and depositories; but neither the wisdom nor the interest of men ever provided more effectual checks against forgery and corruption, than we have in the instance before us. And

the argument in particular, for the antecedence of the prophecies to the events in the New Testament is so well established by the concurrence of the two rival parties, that we do not see how it is in the power of additional testimony to strengthen it.

But neither is it true that the prophecies are delivered in terms so obscure as to require a painful examination before we can obtain a full perception of the argument. Those prophecies which relate to the fate of particular cities, such as Nineveh, and Tyre, and Babylon; those which relate to the issue of particular wars, in which the kings of Israel and Judah were engaged; and some of those which relate to the future history of the adjoining countries, are not so much veiled by symbolical language as to elude the understanding, even of the most negligent observers. It is true, that in these instances, both the prophecy and the fulfilment appear to us in the light of a distant antiquity. They have accomplished their end. They kept alive the faith and worship of successive generations. They multiplied the evidences of the true religion, and account for a phenomenon in ancient history that is otherwise inexplicable, the existence and preservation of one solitary monument of pure theism in the midst of a corrupt and idolatrous world.

But to descend a little farther. We gather from the state of opinions at the time of our Saviour so many testimonies to the clearness of the old prophecies. The time and the place of our Saviour's appearance in the world, and the triumphant progress, if not the nature of his kingdom, were perfectly understood by the priests and chief men of Judea. We have it from the testimony of profane authors, that there was, at that time, a general expectation of a prince and a prophet all over the East. The destruction of Jerusalem was another example of the fulfilment of a clear prophecy; and this, added to other predictions uttered by our Saviour, and which received their accomplishment in the first generation of the Christian church, would have its

use in sustaining the faith of the disciples amidst the perplexities of that anxious and distressing period.

We can even come down to the present day, and point to the accomplishment of clear prophecies in the actual history of the world. The present state of Egypt, and the present state of the Jews, are the examples which we fix upon. The one is an actual fulfilment of a clear prophecy; the other is also an actual fulfilment, and forms in itself the likeliest preparation for another accomplishment that is yet to come. Nor do we conceive, that these clear and literal fulfilments exhaust the whole of the argument from prophecy. They only form one part of the argument, but a part so obvious and irresistible as should invite every lover of truth to the examination of the remainder. They should secure such a degree of respect for the subject, as to engage the attention, and awaken even in the mind of the most rapid and superficial observer, a suspicion that there may be something in it. They should soften that contempt which repels so many from investigating the argument at all; or at all events, they render that contempt inexcusable.

The whole history of the Jews is calculated to allure the curiosity, and had it not been leagued with the defence and illustration of our faith, would have drawn the attention of many a philosopher, as the most singular exhibition of human nature that ever was recorded in the annals of the world. The most satisfying cause of this phenomenon is to be looked for in the history which describes its origin and progress; and by denying the truth of that history, you abandon the only explanation which can be given of this wonderful people. It is quite in vain to talk of the immutability of Eastern habits, as exemplified in the nations of Asia. What other people ever survived the same annihilating processes? We do not talk of conquest, where the whole amount of the effect is in general a change of dynasty or of government; but where the language, the habits, the denomination, and above all, the geo-

graphical position, still remain to keep up the identity of the people. But in the history of the Jews, we see a strong indestructible principle, which maintained them in a separate form of existence amid changes that no other nation ever survived. We confine ourselves to the overthrow of their nation in the first century of our epoch, and appeal to the disinterested testimonies of Tacitus and Josephus, if ever the cruelty of war devised a process of more terrible energy for the utter extirpation of a name, and a remembrance from the world. They have been dispersed among all countries. They have no common tie of locality or government to keep them together. All the ordinary principles of assimilation, which make law, and religion, and manners so much a matter of geography, are in their instance suspended. Even the smallest particles of this broken mass have resisted an affinity of almost universal operation, and remain undiluted by the strong and overwhelming admixture of foreign ingredients. And in exception to every thing which history has recorded of the revolutions of the species, we see in this wonderful race a vigorous principle of identity, which has remained in undiminished force for nearly two thousand years, and still pervades every shred and fragment of their widely scattered population. Now if the infidel insists upon it, we shall not rest on this as an argument. We can afford to give it up: for in the abundance of our resources, we feel independent of it. We shall say that it is enough, if it can reclaim him from his levity, and compel his attention to the other evidences which we have to offer him.

All we ask of him is to allow, that the undeniable singularity which is before his eyes gives him a sanction; at least, to examine the other singularities to which we make pretensions. If he goes back to the past history of the Jews, he will see in their wars the same unexampled preservation of their name and their nation. He will see them surviving the process of an actual transportation into another country. In short,

he will see them to be unlike all other people in what observation offers, and authentic history records of them; and the only concession that we demand of him from all this, is, that their pretensions to be unlike other people in their extraordinary revelations from heaven, is at least possible, and deserves to be inquired into.

It may not be out of place to expose a species of injustice, which has often been done to the Christian argument. The defence of Christianity consists of several distinct arguments, which have sometimes been multiplied beyond what is necessary, and even sometimes beyond what is tenable. In addition to the main evidence which lies in the testimony given to the miracles of the gospel, there is the evidence of prophecy; there is the evidence of collateral testimony; there is the internal evidence. The argument under each of these heads is often made to undergo a farther subdivision; and it is not to be wondered at, that in the multitude of observations, the defence of Christianity may often be made to rest upon ground which, to say the least of it, is precarious or vulnerable. Now the injustice which we complain of is, that when the friends of our religion are dislodged from some feeble outwork, raised by an unskilful officer in the cause, its enemies raise the cry of a decisive victory. But, for our own part, we could see her driven from all her defences, and surrender them without a sigh, so long as the phalanx of her historical evidence remains impenetrable. Behind this unscaled barrier, we could intrench ourselves, and eye the light skirmishing before us with no other sentiment than of regret, that our friends should, by the eagerness of their misplaced zeal, have given our enemy the appearance of a triumph. We offer no opinion as to the two-fold interpretation of prophecy; but though it were refuted by argument, and disgraced by ridicule, all that portion of evidence which lies in the numerous examples of literal and unambiguous fulfilment remains unaffected.

by it. Many there are who deny the inspiration of the Song of Solomon. But in what possible way does this affect the records of the evangelical history? Just as much as it affects the lives of Plutarch, or the Annals of Tacitus. There are a thousand subjects on which infidels may idly push the triumph, and Christians be as idly galled by the severity, or even the truth of their observations. We point to the historical evidence of the New Testament, and ask them to dispose of it. It is there that we call them to the onset; for there lies the main strength of the Christian argument. It is true, that in the evidence of prophecy, we see a rising barrier, which, in the progress of centuries, may receive from time to time a new accumulation to the materials which form it. In this way, the evidence of prophecy may come, in time, to surpass the evidence of miracles. The restoration of the Jews will be the fulfilment of a clear prophecy, and form a proud and animating period in the history of our religion. "Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles, how much more their fulness."

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## CHAPTER VII.

### *Remarks on the Skepticism of Geologists.*

VII. THE late speculations in geology form another example of a distant and unconnected circumstance being suffered to cast an unmerited disgrace over the whole of the argument. They give a higher antiquity to the world than most of those who read the Bible had any conception of. Admit this antiquity, and in what possible way does it touch upon the historical evidence of the New Testament? The credibility of the gospel miracles stands upon its own appropriate foundation, the recorded testimony of numerous and unexceptionable witnesses. The only way in which



we can overthrow that credibility is by attacking the testimony, or disproving the authenticity of the record. Every other science is tried upon its own peculiar evidence; and all we contend for is, that the same justice be done to theology. When a mathematician offers to apply his reasoning to the phenomena of mind, the votaries of moral science resent it as an invasion, and make their appeal to the evidence of consciousness. When an amateur of botany, upon some vague analogies, offers his confident affirmations as to the structure and parts of the human body, there would be an instantaneous appeal to the knife and demonstrations of the anatomist. Should a mineralogist, upon the exhibition of an ingenious or well-supported theory, pronounce upon the history of our Saviour and his miracles; we would call it another example of an arbitrary and unphilosophical extension of principles beyond the field of their legitimate application. We would appeal to the kind and the quantity of testimony upon which that history is supported. We would suffer ourselves to be delighted by the brilliancy, or even convinced by the evidence of his speculations; but we would feel that the history of those facts, which form the groundwork of our faith, is as little affected by them, as the history of any storm, or battle, or warrior, which has come down to us in the most genuine and approved records of past ages.

But whatever be the external evidence of testimony, or however strong may be its visible characters of truth and honesty, is not the falsehood or the contradiction which we may detect in the subject of that testimony sufficient to discredit it? Had we been original spectators of our Saviour's miracles, we must have had as strong a conviction of their reality as it is in the power of testimony to give us. Had we been the eyewitnesses of his character and history, and caught from actual observation the impression of his worth, the internal proofs that no jugglery or falsehood could have been intended, would have been certainly as strong as

the internal proofs which are now exhibited to us, and which consist in the simplicity of the narrative, and that tone of perfect honesty which pervades, in a manner so distinct and intelligible, every composition of the apostles. Yet, with all these advantages, if Jesus Christ had asserted as a truth what we confidently knew to be a falsehood; had he, for example, upon the strength of his prophetic endowments, pronounced upon the secret of a person's age, and told us that he was thirty, when we knew him to be forty, would not this have made us stumble at all his pretensions, and in spite of every other argument and appearance, would we not have withdrawn our confidence from him as a teacher from God? This we allow would have been a most serious dilemma. It would have been that state of neutrality which admits of nothing positive or satisfying on either side of the question; or rather, what is still more distressing, which gives me the most positive and satisfactory appearances on both sides. We could not abandon the truth of the miracles, because we saw them. Could we give them up, we should determine on a positive rejection, and our minds would find repose in absolute infidelity. But as the case stands it is skepticism. There is nothing like it in any other department of inquiry. We can appeal to no actual example; but a student of natural science may be made to understand the puzzle, when we ask him, how he would act, if the experiment, which he conducts under the most perfect sameness of circumstances, were to land him in opposite results? He would vary and repeat his experiments. He would try to detect the inconsistency, and would rejoice, if he at last found that the difficulty lay in the errors of his own observation, and not in the inexplicable nature of the subject. All this he would do in anxious and repeated endeavours, before he inferred that nature persevered in no law, and that constancy, which is the foundation of all science, was perpetually broke in upon by the most capricious and unlooked for appearances, before he

would abandon himself to skepticism, and pronounce philosophy to be an impossible attainment.

It is our part to imitate this example. If Jesus Christ has, on the one hand, performed miracles, and sustained in the whole tenor of his history the character of a prophet, and on the other hand, asserted to be true what we undeniably know to be a falsehood, this is a dilemma which we are called upon to resolve by every principle that can urge the human mind in the pursuit of liberal inquiry. It is not enough to say, that the phenomena in question do not fall within the dominion of philosophy; and we therefore leave them as a fair exercise and amusement to commentators. The mathematician may say, and has said the same thing of the moralist, yet there are moralists in the world who will prosecute their speculations in spite of him; and what is more, there are men who take a wider survey than either, who rise above these professional prejudices, and will allow that, in each department of inquiry, the subjects which offer are entitled to a candid and respectful consideration. The naturalist may pronounce the same rapid judgment upon the difficulties of the theologian; yet there ever will be theologians who feel a peculiar interest in their subject; and we trust that there ever will be men, with a higher grasp of mind than either the mere theologian, or the mere naturalist, who are ready to acknowledge the claims of truth in every quarter—who are superior to that narrow contempt which has made such an unhappy and malignant separation among the different orders of scientific men—who will examine the evidences of the gospel history, and if they are found to be sufficient, will view the miracles of our Saviour with the same liberal and philosophic curiosity with which they would contemplate any grand phenomenon in the moral history of the species. If there really appears on the face of this investigation, to be such a difficulty as the one in question, a philosopher of the order we are now describing will make many an anxious effort

to extricate himself; he will not soon acquiesce in a skepticism, of which there is no other example in the wide field of human speculation; he will either make out the insufficiency of the historical evidence, or prove that the falsehood ascribed to Jesus Christ has no existence. He will try to dispose of one of the terms of the alleged contradiction, before he can prevail upon himself to admit both, and deliver his mind to a state of uncertainty most painful to those who respect truth in all her departments.

We offer the above observations, not so much for the purpose of doing away a difficulty which we conscientiously believe to have no existence, as for the purpose of exposing the rapid, careless, and unphilosophical procedure of some enemies to the Christian argument. They, in the first instance, take up the rapid assumption that Jesus Christ has, either through himself, or his immediate disciples, made an assertion as to the antiquity of the globe which, upon the faith of their geological speculations, they know to be a falsehood. After having fastened this strain upon the subject of the testimony, they by one summary act of the understanding lay aside all the external evidence for the miracles and general character of our Saviour. They will not wait to be told that this evidence is a distinct subject of examination; and that, if actually attended to, it will be found much stronger than the evidence of any other fact or history which has come down to us in the written memorials of past ages. If this evidence is to be rejected, it must be rejected on its own proper grounds; but if all positive testimony and all sound reasoning upon human affairs go to establish it, then the existence of such proof is a phenomenon which remains to be accounted for, and must ever stand in the way of positive infidelity. Until we dispose of it, we can carry our opposition to the claims of our religion no farther than to the length of an ambiguous and midway skepticism. By adopting a decisive infidelity we reject a testimony which, of all

others, has come down to us in the most perfect and unsuspecting form. We lock up a source of evidence which is often repaired to in other questions of science and history. We cut off the authority of principles which, if once exploded, will not terminate in the solitary mischief of darkening and destroying our theology, but will shed a baleful uncertainty over many of the most interesting speculations on which the human mind can expatiate.

Even admitting, then, this single objection in the subject of our Saviour's testimony, the whole length to which we can legitimately carry the objection is skepticism, or that dilemma of the mind into which it is thrown by two contradictory appearances. This is the unavoidable result of admitting both terms in the alleged contradiction. Upon the strength of all the reasoning which has hitherto occupied us, we challenge the infidel to dispose of the one term which lies in the strength of the historical evidence. But in different ways we may dispose of the other, which lies in the alleged falsehood of our Saviour's testimony. We may deny the truth of the geological speculation; nor is it necessary to be an accomplished geologist that we may be warranted to deny it. We appeal to the speculations of the geologists themselves. They neutralize one another, and leave us in possession of free ground for the informations of the Old Testament. Our imaginations have been much regaled by the brilliancy of their speculations, but they are so opposite to each other that we now cease to be impressed by their evidence. But there are other ways of disposing of the supposed falsehood of our Saviour's testimony. Does he really assert what has been called the Mosical antiquity of the world? It is true that he gives his distinct testimony to the divine legation of Moses; but does Moses ever say, that when God created the heavens and the earth, he did more at the time alluded to than transform them out of previously existing materials? Or does he ever say, that there was not an

interval of many ages between the first act of creation, described in the first verse of the book of Genesis, and said to have been performed at the beginning; and those more detailed operations, the account of which commences at the second verse, and which are described to us as having been performed in so many days? Or, finally, does he ever make us to understand, that the genealogies of man went any further than to fix the antiquity of the species, and, of consequence, that they left the antiquity of the globe a free subject for the speculations of philosophers?—We do not pledge ourselves for the truth of one or all of these suppositions. Nor is it necessary that we should. It is enough that any of them is infinitely more rational than the rejection of Christianity in the face of its historical evidence. This historical evidence remains in all the obstinacy of experimental and well-attested facts; and as there are so many ways of expunging the other term in the alleged contradiction, we appeal to every enlightened reader, if it is at all candid or philosophical to suffer it to stand.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### *On the internal Evidence, and the Objections of deistical Infidels.*

THERE is another species of evidence for Christianity, which we have not yet noticed,—what is commonly called the internal evidence, consisting of those proofs that Christianity is a dispensation from heaven, which are founded upon the nature of its doctrines, and the character of the dispensation itself. The term “internal evidence” may be made, indeed, to take up more than this. We may take up the New Testament as a human composition, and without any reference to its subsequent history, or to the direct and external testimonies by which it is supported, we may collect

from the performance itself such marks of truth and honesty, as entitle us to conclude, that the human agents employed in the construction of this book were men of veracity and principle. This argument has already been resorted to, and a very substantial argument it is. It is of frequent application in questions of general criticism; and upon its authority alone many of the writers of past times have been admitted into credit, and many have been condemned as unworthy of it. The numerous and correct allusions to the customs and institutions, and other statistics of the age in which the pieces of the New Testament profess to have been written, give evidence of their antiquity. The artless and undesigned way in which these allusions are interwoven with the whole history, impresses upon us the perfect simplicity of the authors, and the total absence of every wish or intention to palm an imposture upon the world. And there is such a thing too as a general air of authenticity, which, however difficult to resolve into particulars, gives a very close and powerful impression of truth to the narrative. There is nothing fanciful in this species of internal evidence. It carries in it all the certainty of experience, and experience too upon a familiar and well-known subject,—the characters of honesty in the written testimony of our fellow men. We are often called upon in private and every-day life to exercise our judgment upon the spoken testimony of others, and we both feel and understand the powerful evidence which lies in the tone, the manner, the circumstantiality, the number, the agreement of the witnesses, and the consistency of all the particulars with what we already know from other sources of information. Now it is undeniable, that all those marks which give evidence and credibility to spoken testimony, may also exist to a very impressive degree in written testimony; and the argument founded upon them, so far from being fanciful or illegitimate, has the sanction of a principle which no philosopher will refuse; the experience of the human mind on a

subject on which it is much exercised, and which lies completely within the range of its observation.

We cannot say so much, however, for the other species of internal evidence, that which is founded upon the reasonableness of the doctrines, or the agreement which is conceived to subsist between the nature of the Christian religion and the character of the Supreme Being. We have experience of man, but we have no experience of God. We can reason upon the procedure of man in given circumstances, because this is an accessible subject, and comes under the cognizance of observation; but we cannot reason on the procedure of the Almighty in given circumstances. This is an inaccessible subject, and comes not within the limits of direct and personal observation. The one, like the scale, and compass, and measurements of Sir Isaac Newton, will lead you on safe and firm footing to the true economy of the heavens; the other, like the ether and whirlpools, and unfounded imaginations of Des Cartes, will not only lead you to misconceive that economy, but to maintain a stubborn opposition to the only competent evidence that can be offered upon the subject.

We feel that in thus disclaiming all support from what is commonly understood by the internal evidence, we do not follow the general example of those who have written on the deistical controversy. Take up Leland's performance, and it will be found that one half of his discussion is expended upon the reasonableness of the doctrines, and in asserting the validity of the argument which is founded upon that reasonableness. It would save a vast deal of controversy, if it could be proved that all this is superfluous and uncalled for; that upon the authority of the proofs already insisted on, the New Testament must be received as a revelation from heaven; and that, instead of sitting in judgment over it, nothing remains on our part but an act of unreserved submission to all the doctrine and information which it offers to us. It is conceived,



that in this way the general argument might be made to assume a more powerful and impressive aspect; and the defence of Christianity be more accommodated to the spirit and philosophy of the times.

Since the spirit of Lord Bacon's philosophy began to be rightly understood, the science of external nature has advanced with a rapidity unexampled in the history of all former ages. The great axiom of his philosophy is so simple in its nature, and so undeniable in its evidence, that it is astonishing how philosophers were so late in acknowledging it, or in being directed by its authority. It is more than two thousand years since the phenomena of external nature were objects of liberal curiosity to speculative and intelligent men. Yet two centuries have scarcely elapsed since the true path of investigation has been rightly pursued, and steadily persevered in; since the evidence of experience has been received as paramount to every other evidence, or, in other words, since philosophers have agreed that the only way to learn the magnitude of an object is to measure it, the only way to learn its tangible properties is to touch it, and the only way to learn its visible properties is to look at it.

Nothing can be more safe or more infallible than the procedure of the inductive philosophy as applied to the phenomena of external nature. It is the eye or the earwitness of every thing which it records. It is at liberty to classify appearances, but then in the work of classifying, it must be directed only by observation. It may group phenomena according to their resemblances. It may express these resemblances in words, and announce them to the world in the form of general laws. Yet such is the hardihood of the inductive philosophy, that though a single well-attested fact should overturn a whole system, that fact must be admitted. A single experiment is often made to cut short the finest process of generalization, however painful and humiliating the sacrifice; and though a theory, the most simple and magnificent that ever

charmed the eye of an enthusiast, was on the eve of emerging from it.

In submitting, then, to the rules of the inductive philosophy, we do not deny that certain sacrifices must be made, and some of the most urgent propensities of the mind put under severe restraint and regulation. The human mind feels restless and dissatisfied under the anxieties of ignorance. It longs for the repose of conviction; and to gain this repose, it will often rather precipitate its conclusions, than wait for the tardy lights of observation and experiment. There is such a thing, too, as the love of simplicity and system—a prejudice of the understanding, which disposes it to include all the phenomena of nature under a few sweeping generalities—an indolence, which loves to repose on the beauties of a theory, rather than encounter the fatiguing detail of its evidences—a painful reluctance to the admission of facts, which, however true, break in upon the majestic simplicity that we would fain ascribe to the laws and operations of the universe.

Now, it is the glory of Lord Bacon's philosophy to have achieved a victory over all these delusions; to have disciplined the minds of its votaries into an entire submission to evidence; to have trained them up in a kind of steady coldness to all the splendour and magnificence of theory, and taught them to follow, with unfaltering step, wherever the sure though humble path of experiment may lead them.

To justify the cautious procedure of the inductive philosophy, nothing more is necessary than to take a view of the actual powers and circumstances of humanity; of the entire ignorance of man when he comes into the world, and of the steps by which that ignorance is enlightened; of the numerous errors into which he is misled the moment he ceases to observe, and begins to presume or to excogitate; of the actual history of science; its miserable progress, so long as categories and principles retained their ascendancy in the schools; and the splendour and rapidity of its tri-

uphs, so soon as man understood that he was nothing more than the disciple of nature, and must take his lesson as nature offers it to him.

What is true of the science of external nature, holds equally true of the science and phenomena of mind. On this subject, too, the presumptuous ambition of man carried him far from the sober path of experimental inquiry. He conceived that his business was, not to observe, but to speculate; to construct systems rather than consult his own experience and the experience of others; to collect the materials of his theory, not from the history of observed facts, but from a set of assumed and excogitated principles. Now the same observations apply to this department of inquiry. We must admit to be true, not what we presume, but what we find to be so. We must restrain the enterprises of fancy. A law of the human mind must be only a series of well-authenticated facts, reduced to one general description, or groupèd together under some general points of resemblance. The business of the moral as well as of the natural philosopher is, not to assert what he excogitates, but to record what he observes; not to amuse himself with the speculations of fancy, but to describe phenomena as he sees or as he feels them. This is the business of the moral as well as of the natural inquirer. We must extend the application of Lord Bacon's principles to moral and metaphysical subjects. It was long before this application was recognised, or acted upon by philosophers. Many of the continental speculations are still infected with the presumptuous *a priori* spirit of the old schools; though the writings of Reid and Stewart have contributed much to chase away this spirit from the metaphysics of our own country, and to bring the science of mind, as well as matter, under the entire dominion of the inductive philosophy.

These general observations we conceive to be a most direct and applicable introduction to that part of the subject which is before us. In discussing the evi-

dence of Christianity, all that we ask of our reader is to bring along with him the same sober and inductive spirit that is now deemed so necessary in the prosecution of the other sciences; to abandon every system of theology that is not supported by evidence, however much it may gratify his taste, or regale his imagination, and to admit any system of theology that is supported by evidence, however repugnant to his feelings or his prejudices; to make conviction, in fact, paramount to inclination, or to fancy; and to maintain, through the whole process of the investigation, that strength and intrepidity of character which will follow wherever the light of argument may conduct him, though it should land him in conclusions the most nauseous and unpalatable.

We have no time to enter into causes; but the fact is undeniable. Many philosophers of the present day are disposed to nauseate every thing connected with theology. They associate something low and ignoble with the prosecution of it. They regard it as not a fit subject for liberal inquiry. They turn away from it with disgust, as one of the humblest departments of literary exertion. We do not say that they reject its evidences, but they evade the investigation of them. They feel no conviction; not because they have established the fallacy of a single argument, but because they entertain a general dislike at the subject, and will not attend to it. They love to expatiate in the more kindred fields of science or elegant literature; and while the most respectful caution, and humility, and steadiness are seen to preside over every department of moral and physical investigation, theology is the only subject that is suffered to remain the victim of prejudice, and of a contempt the most unjust and the most unphilosophical.

We do not speak of this feeling as an impiety; we speak of it as an offence against the principles of just speculation. We do not speak of it as it allures the heart from the influence of religion; we speak of it as

it allures the understanding from the influence of evidence and truth. In a word, we are not preaching against it; we reason against it. We contend that it is a transgression against the rules of the inductive philosophy. All that we want is, the application of Lord Bacon's principles to the investigation before us; and as the influence of prejudice and disgust is banished from every other department of inquiry, we conceive it fair that it should be banished from theology also, and that our subject should have the common advantage of a hearing,—where no partiality of the heart or fancy is admitted, and no other influence acknowledged than the influence of evidence over the convictions of the understanding.

Let us therefore endeavour to evince the success and felicity with which Lord Bacon's principles may be applied to the investigation before us.

According to Bacon, man is ignorant of every thing antecedent to observation; and there is not a single department of inquiry, in which he does not err the moment that he abandons it. It is true that the greater part of every individual's knowledge is derived immediately from testimony; but it is only from testimony that brings home to his conviction the observation of others. Still it is observation which lies at the bottom of his knowledge. Still it is man taking his lesson from the actual condition of the thing which he contemplates; a condition that is altogether independent of his will, and which no speculation of his can modify or destroy. There is an obstinacy in the processes of nature which he cannot control. He must follow it. The construction of a system should not be a creative, but an imitative process, which admits nothing but what evidence assures us to be true, and is founded only on the lessons of experience. It is not by the exercise of a sublime and speculative ingenuity that man arrives at truth. It is by letting himself down to the drudgery of observation. It is by descending to the sober work of seeing, and feeling, and experimenting.

Wherever, in short, he has not had the benefit of his own observation, or the observation of others brought home to his conviction by credible testimony, there he is ignorant.

This is found to hold true, even in those sciences where the objects of inquiry are the most familiar and the most accessible. Before the right method of philosophising was acted upon, how grossly did philosophers misinterpret the phenomena of external nature, when a steady perseverance in the path of observation could have led them to infallible certainty! How misled in their conception of every thing around them, when, instead of making use of their senses, they delivered themselves up to the exercises of a solitary abstraction, and thought to explain every thing by the fantastic play of unmeaning terms, and imaginary principles! And, when at last set on the right path of discovery, how totally different were the results of actual observation, from those systems which antiquity had rendered venerable, and the authority of great names had recommended to the acquiescence of many centuries! This proves that even in the most familiar subjects, man knows every thing by observation, and is ignorant of every thing without it; and that he cannot advance a single footstep in the acquirement of truth, till he bid adieu to the delusions of theory, and sternly refuse indulgence to its fondest anticipations.

Thus, there is both a humility and a hardihood in the philosophical temper. They are the same in principle, though different in display. The first is founded on a sense of ignorance, and disposes the mind of the philosopher to pay the most respectful attention to every thing that is offered in the shape of evidence. The second consists in a determined purpose to reject and to sacrifice every thing that offers to oppose the influence of evidence, or to set itself up against its legitimate and well established conclusions. In the ethereal whirlpools of Des Cartes, we see a transgression against the humility of the philosophical charac-

ter. It is the presumption of knowledge on a subject, where the total want of observation should have confined him to the modesty of ignorance. In the Newtonian system of the world, we see both humility and hardihood. Sir Isaac commences his investigation with all the modesty of a respectful inquirer. His is the docility of a scholar, who is sensible that he has all to learn. He takes his lesson as experience offers it to him, and yields a passive obedience to the authority of this great schoolmaster. It is in his obstinate adherence to the truth which his master has given him, that the hardihood of the philosophical character begins to appear. We see him announce, with entire confidence, both the fact and its legitimate consequences. We see him not deterred by the singularity of his conclusions, and quite unmindful of that host of antipathies which the reigning taste and philosophy of the times mustered up to oppose him. We see him resisting the influence of every authority, but the authority of experience. We see that the beauty of the old system had no power to charm him from that process of investigation by which he destroyed it. We see him sitting upon its merits with the severity of a judge, unmoved by all those graces of simplicity and magnificence which the sublime genius of its inventor had thrown around it.

We look upon these two constituents of the philosophical temper as forming the best preparation for finally terminating in the decided Christian. In appreciating the pretensions of Christianity, there is a call both upon the humility and the hardihood of every inquirer; the humility which feels its own ignorance, and submits without reserve to whatever comes before it in the shape of authentic and well established evidence; and the hardihood, which sacrifices every taste and every prejudice at the shrine of conviction, which defies the scorn of a pretended philosophy, which is not ashamed of a profession that some conceive to be degraded by the homage of the superstitious vulgar,

which can bring down its mind to the homeliness of the gospel, and renounce, without a sigh, all that is elegant, and splendid, and fascinating in the speculations of moralists. In attending to the complexion of the Christian argument, we are widely mistaken, if it is not precisely that kind of argument which will be most readily admitted by those whose minds have been trained to the soundest habits of philosophical investigation; and if that spirit of cautious and sober-minded inquiry to which modern science stands indebted for all her triumphs, is not the very identical spirit which leads us to "cast down all our lofty imaginations, and to bring every thought into the captivity of the obedience of Christ."

On entering into any department of inquiry, the best preparation is that docility of mind which is founded on a sense of our total ignorance of the subject: and nothing is looked upon as more unphilosophical than the temerity of that *a priori* spirit, which disposes many to presume before they investigate. But if we admit the total ignorance of man antecedent to observation, even in those sciences where the objects of inquiry are the nearest and the most familiar, we will be more ready to admit his total ignorance of those subjects which are more remote and more inaccessible. If caution and modesty be esteemed so philosophical, even when employed in that little field of investigation which comes within the range of our senses; why should they not be esteemed philosophical when employed on a subject so vast, so awful, so remote from direct and personal observation, as the government of God? There can be nothing so completely above us, and beyond us, as the plans of the Infinite Mind, which extend to all time, and embrace all worlds. There is no subject to which the cautious and humble spirit of Lord Bacon's philosophy is more applicable; nor can we conceive a more glaring rebellion against the authority of his maxims, than for the beings of a day to sit in judgment upon the Eternal, and apply



their paltry experience to the counsels of his high and unfathomable wisdom. We do not speak of it as impious; we speak of it as unphilosophical. We are not bringing the decrees of the orthodox to bear against it; we are bringing the principles of our modern and enlightened schools. We are applying the very same principles to a system of theism, that we would do to a system of geology. Both may regale the fancy with the grandeur of their contemplations; both may receive embellishment from the genius and imagination of their inventors; both may carry us along with the powers of a captivating eloquence. But all this is not enough to satisfy the severe and scrupulous spirit of the modern philosophy. Give us facts. Give us appearances. Show us how, from the experience of a life or a century, you can draw a legitimate conclusion so boundless in its extent, and by which you propose to fix down both the processes of a remote antiquity, and the endless progressions either of nature or of providence in future ages. Are there any historical documents? Any memorials of the experience of past times? On a question of such magnitude, we would esteem the recorded observations of some remote age to be peculiarly valuable, and worth all the ingenuity and eloquence which a philosopher could bestow on the limited experience of one or two generations. A process of geology may take millions of years before it reaches its accomplishment. It is impossible that we can collect the law or the character of this process from the experience of a single century, which does not furnish us one single step in this vast and immeasurable progression. We look as far as we can into a distant antiquity, and take hold with avidity of any authentic document, by which we can ascertain a single fact to guide and to enlighten us in this interesting speculation. The same caution is necessary in the subject before us. The administration of the Supreme Being is coeval with the first purposes of his uncreated mind, and it points to eternity. The life

of man is but a point in that progress, to which we see no end, and can assign no beginning. We are not able to collect the law or the character of this administration from an experience so momentary. We therefore cast an eye on the history of past times. We examine every document which comes before us. We compare all the moral phenomena which can be collected from the narratives of antiquity. We seize with avidity every record of the manifestations of Providence, every fact which can enlighten the ways of God to man; and we would esteem it a deviation from the right spirit and temper of philosophical investigation, were we to suffer the crude or fanciful speculations of our own limited experience to take a precedency over the authentic informations of history.

But this is not all. Our experience is not only limited in point of time; it is also limited in point of extent. To assign the character of the divine administration from the little that offers itself to the notice of our own personal experience, would be far more absurd than to infer the history and character of the kingdom from the history and character of our own family. Vain is the attempt to convey in language what the most powerful imagination sinks under; how small the globe, and "all which it inherits," is in the immensity of creation! How humble a corner in the immeasurable fields of nature and of providence! If the whole visible creation were to be swept away, we think of the dark and awful solitude which it would leave behind it in the unpeopled regions of space. But to a mind that could take in the whole, and throw a wide survey over the innumerable worlds which roll beyond the ken of the human eye, there would be no blank, and the universe of God would appear a scene as goodly and majestic as ever. Now it is the administration of this God that we sit in judgment upon; the counsels of Him, whose wisdom and energy are of a kind so inexplicable; whom no magnitude can overpower, whom no littleness can escape, whom no va-

riety can bewilder; who gives vegetation to every blade of grass, and moves every particle of blood which circulates through the veins of the minutest animal; and all this by the same omnipotent arm that is abroad upon the universe, and presides in high authority over the destiny of all worlds.

It is impossible not to mingle the moral impressions of piety with such a contemplation. But suppose these impressions to be excluded, that the whole may be reduced to a matter of abstract and unfeeling intelligence. The question under consideration is, How far the experience of man can lead him to any certain conclusions, as to the character of the divine administration; if it does lead him to some certain conclusions, then in the spirit of the Baconian philosophy, he will apply these conclusions to the information derived from other sources; and they will of course affect, or destroy, or confirm the credibility of that information. If, on the other hand, it appears that experience gives no light, no direction on the subject, then, in the very same spirit, he will submit his mind as a blank surface to all the positive information which comes to it from any other quarter. We take our lesson as it comes to us, provided we are satisfied beforehand that it comes from a source which is authentic. We set up no presumptions of our own against the authority of the unquestionable evidence that we have met with, and reject all the suggestions which our defective experience can furnish, as the follies of a rash and fanciful speculation.

Now, let it be observed, that the great strength of the Christian argument lies in the historical evidence for the truth of the gospel narrative. In discussing the light of this evidence, we walk by the light of experience. We assign the degree of weight that is due to the testimony of the first Christians upon the observed principles of human nature. We do not step beyond the cautious procedure of Lord Bacon's philosophy. We keep within the safe and certain limits of experi-

mental truth. We believe the testimony of the apostles, because, from what we know of the human character, it is impossible that men in their circumstances could have persevered as they did in the assertion of a falsehood; it is impossible that they could have imposed this falsehood upon such a multitude of followers; it is impossible that they could have escaped detection, surrounded as they were by a host of enemies, so eager and so determined in their resentments. On this kind of argument we are quite at home. There is no theory, no assumption. We feel every inch of the ground we are treading upon. The degree of credit that should be annexed to the testimony of the apostles is altogether a question of experience. Every principle which we apply towards the decision of this question is founded upon materials which lie before us, and are every day within the reach of observation. Our belief in the testimony of the apostles is founded upon our experience of human nature and human affairs. In the whole process of the inquiry, we never wander from that sure, though humble path, which has been pointed out to us by the great master of philosophising. We never cast off the authority of those maxims which have been found in every other department of knowledge to be sound and infallible. We never suffer assumption to take the precedency of observation, or abandon that safe and certain mode of investigation, which is the only one suited to the real mediocrity of our powers.

It appears to us, that the disciples of the infidel philosophy have reversed this process. They take a loftier flight. You seldom find them upon the ground of the historical evidence. It is not, in general, upon the weight or the nature of human testimony, that they venture to pronounce on the credibility of the Christian revelation. It is on the character of that revelation itself. It is on what they conceive to be the absurdity of its doctrines. It is because they see something in the nature or dispensation of Christianity, which they think dispa-

ging to the attributes of God, and not agreeable to that line of proceeding which the Almighty should observe in the government of his creatures. Rousseau expresses his astonishment at the strength of the historical testimony; so strong, that the inventor of the narrative appeared to him to be more miraculous than the hero. But the absurdities of this said revelation are sufficient in his mind to bear down the whole weight of its direct and external evidences. There was something in the doctrines of the New Testament repulsive to the taste and the imagination, and perhaps even to the convictions of this interesting enthusiast. He could not reconcile them with his pre-established conceptions of the divine character and mode of operation. To submit to these doctrines, he behoved to surrender that theism, which the powers of his ardent mind had wrought up into a most beautiful and delicious speculation. Such a sacrifice was not to be made. It was too painful. It would have taken away from him, what every mind of genius and sensibility esteems to be the highest of all luxuries. It would destroy a system, which had all that is fair and magnificent to recommend it, and mar the gracefulness of that fine intellectual picture, on which this wonderful man had bestowed all the embellishments of feeling, and fancy, and eloquence.

In as far, then, as we can judge of the conduct of man in given circumstances, we would pass a favourable sentence upon the testimony of the apostles. But, says the deist, I judge of the conduct of God; and what the apostles tell me of him is so opposite to that judgment, that I discredit their testimony. The question at issue between us is, shall we admit the testimony of the apostles, upon the application of principles founded on observation, and as certain as is our experience of human affairs? Or, shall we reject that testimony upon the application of principles that are altogether beyond the range of observation, and as doubtful and imperfect in their nature, as is our ex-

perience of the councils of heaven? In the first argument there is no assumption. We are competent to judge of the behaviour of man in given circumstances. This is a subject completely accessible to observation. The second argument is founded upon assumption entirely. We are not competent to judge of the conduct of the Almighty in given circumstances. Here we are precluded, by the nature of the subject, from the benefit of observation. There is no antecedent experience to guide or to enlighten us. It is not right for man to assume what is right, or proper, or natural for the Almighty to do. It is not in the mere spirit of piety that we say so; it is in the spirit of the soundest experimental philosophy. The argument of the Christian is precisely what the maxims of Lord Bacon would dispose us to acquiesce in. The argument of the infidel is precisely that argument which the same maxims would dispose us to reject; and when put by the side of the Christian argument, it appears as crude and as unphilosophical as do the ingenious speculations of the schoolmen, when set in opposition to the rigour, and evidence, and precision which reign in every department of modern science.

The application of Lord Bacon's philosophy to the study of external nature was a happy epoch in the history of physical science. It is not long since this application has been extended to the study of moral and intellectual phenomena. All that we contend for is, that our subject should have the benefit of the same application; and we count it hard, while, in every other department of inquiry, a respect for truth is found sufficient to repress the appetite for system-building, that theology, the loftiest and most inaccessible of all the sciences, should still remain infected with a spirit so exploded and so unphilosophical; and that the fancy, and theory, and unsupported speculation, so current among the deists and demi-infidels of the day, should be held paramount to the authority of facts, which have come down to us with a weight of evidence and

testimony, that is quite unexampled in the history of ancient times.

What is science but a record of observed phenomena, grouped together according to certain points of resemblance, which have been suggested by an actual attention to the phenomena themselves? We never think of questioning the existence of the phenomena, after we have demonstrated the genuineness and authenticity of the record. After this is demonstrated, the singular or unexpected nature of the phenomena is not suffered to weaken their credibility,—a credibility which can only be destroyed by the authority of our own personal observation, or some other record possessed of equal or superior pretensions. But in none of the inductive sciences is it in the power of a student to verify every thing by his own personal observation. He must put up with the observations of others, brought home to the convictions of his own mind by creditable testimony. In the science of geology, this is eminently the case. In a science of such extent, our principles must be in part founded upon the observations of others, transmitted to us from a distant country. And in a science, the processes of which are so lengthened in point of time, our principles should also in part be founded on the observations of others, transmitted to us from a remote antiquity. Any observations of our own are so limited, both in point of space and of time, that we never think of opposing their authority to the evidence which is laid before us. Our whole attention is directed to the validity of the record; and the moment that this validity is established, we hold it incumbent upon us to submit our minds to the entire and unmodified impression of the testimony contained it. Now, all that we ask is, that the same process of investigation be observed in theology, which is held to be so sound and so legitimate in other sciences. In a science of such extent, as to embrace the wide domain of moral and intelligent nature, we feel the littleness of that range to which our own personal obser-

vations are confined. We shall be glad, not merely of the information transmitted to us from a distant country, but of the authentic information transmitted to us by any other order of beings, in some distant and unknown part of the creation. In a science, too, which has for its object the lengthened processes of the divine administration, we should like if any record of past times could enable us to extend our observations beyond the limits of our own ephemeral experience; and if there are any events of a former age possessed of such a peculiar and decisive character, as would help us to some satisfactory conclusion in this greatest and most interesting of the sciences.

On a subject so much above us and beyond us, we would never think of opposing any preconceptions to the evidence of history. We would maintain the humility of the inductive spirit. We would cast about for facts, and events, and appearances. We would offer our minds as a blank surface to every thing that came to them, supported by unexceptionable evidence. It is not upon the nature of the facts themselves that we would pronounce upon their credibility, but upon the nature of that testimony by which they were supported. Our whole attention would be directed to the authority of the record. After this was established, we would surrender our whole understanding to its contents. We would school down every antipathy within us, and disown it as a childish affection, unworthy of a philosopher who professes to follow truth through all the disgusts and discouragements which surround it. There are men of splendid reputation in our enlightened circles who never attended to this speculation, and who annex to the gospel of Christ nothing else than ideas of superstition and vulgarity. In braving their contempt, we would feel ourselves in the best element for the display and exercise of the philosophical temper. We would rejoice in the omnipotence of truth, and anticipate, in triumph, the victory which it must accomplish over the pride of science, and the fas-



tidiousness of literature. It would not be the enthusiasm of a visionary which would support us, but the inward working of the very same principle which sustained Galileo when he adhered to the result of his experiments, and Newton when he opposed his measurements and observations to the tide of prejudice he had to encounter from the prevailing taste and philosophy of the times.

We conceive that inattention to the above principles has led many of the most popular and respected writers in the deistical controversy to introduce a great deal of discussion that is foreign to the merits of the question altogether; and in this way the attention is often turned away from the point in which the main strength of the argument lies. An infidel, for example, objects against one of the peculiar doctrines of Christianity. To repel the objection, the Christian conceives it necessary to vindicate the reasonableness of that doctrine, and to show how consistent it is with all those antecedent conceptions which we derived from the light of natural religion. All this we count superfluous. It is imposing an unnecessary task upon ourselves. Enough for us to have established the authority of the Christian revelation upon the ground of its historical evidence. All that remains is to submit our minds to the fair interpretation of Scripture. Yes; but how do you dispose of the objection drawn from the light of natural religion? In precisely the same way that we would dispose of an objection drawn from some speculative system, against the truth of any physical fact that has been well established by observation or testimony. We would disown the system, and oppose the obstinacy of the fact to all the elegance and ingenuity of the speculation.

We are sensible that this is not enough to satisfy a numerous class of very sincere and well disposed Christians. There are many of this description, who, antecedent to the study of the Christian revelation altogether, repose a very strong confidence in the light

of natural religion, and think that upon the mere strength of its evidence, they can often pronounce with a considerable degree of assurance on the character of the divine administration. To such as these, something more is necessary than the external evidences on which Christianity rests. You must reconcile the doctrines of Christianity with those previous conceptions which the light of nature has given them; and a great deal of elaborate argument is often expended in bringing about this accommodation. It is, of course, a work of greater difficulty, to convince this description of people, though, in point of fact, this difficulty has been overcome, in a way the most masterly and decisive, by one of the soundest and most philosophical of our theologians.\*

To another description of Christians, this attempt to reconcile the doctrines of Christianity with the light of natural religion is superfluous. Give them historical evidence for the truth of Christianity, and all that natural religion may have taught them will fly like so many visionary phantoms before the light of its overbearing authority. With them the argument is reduced to a narrower compass. Is the testimony of the apostles and first Christians sufficient to establish the credibility of the facts which are recorded in the New Testament? The question is made to rest exclusively on the character of this testimony, and the circumstances attending it; and no antecedent theology of their own is suffered to mingle with the investigation. If the historical evidence of Christianity is found to be conclusive, they conceive the investigation to be at an end; and that nothing remains on their part, but an act of unconditional submission to all its doctrines.

Though it might be proper, in the present state of opinion, to accommodate to both these cases, yet we profess ourselves to belong to the latter description of Christians. We hold by the total insufficiency of na-

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\* Bishop Butler, in his *Analogy of Natural and Revealed Religion*.

tural religion to pronounce upon the intrinsic merits of any revelation, and think that the authority of every revelation rests exclusively upon its external evidences, and upon such marks of honesty in the composition itself as would apply to any human performance. We rest this opinion, not upon any fanatical impression of the ignorance of man, or how sinful it is for a weak and guilty mortal to pronounce upon the counsels of heaven, and the laws of the divine administration. We disown this presumption, not merely because it is sinful, but because we conceive it to be unphilosophical, and precisely analogous to that theorising *a priori* spirit, which the wisdom of Bacon has banished from all the schools of philosophy.

For the satisfaction of the first class, we refer them to that argument which has been prosecuted with so much ability and success by Bishop Butler, in his *Analogy of Natural and Revealed Religion*. It is not so much the object of this author to found any positive argument on the accordancy which subsists between the process of the divine administration in nature, and the processes ascribed to God by revelation, as to repel the argument founded upon their supposed discordancy. To one of the second class, the argument of Bishop Butler is not called for; but as to one of the first class, we can conceive nothing more calculated to quiet his difficulties. He believes a God, and he must therefore believe the character and existence of God to be reconcileable with all that he observes in the events and phenomena around him. He questions the claims of the New Testament to be a revelation from heaven, because he conceives, that it ascribes a plan and an economy to the Supreme Being, which are unworthy of his character. We offer no positive solution of this difficulty. We profess ourselves to be too little acquainted with the character of God; and that in this little corner of his works, we see not far enough to offer any decision on the merits of a government, which embraces worlds, and reaches eternity. We think we

do enough, if we give a sufficiency of external proof for the New Testament being a true and authentic message from heaven; and that therefore nothing remains for us but to attend and to submit to it. But the argument of Bishop Butler enables us to do still more than this. It enables us to say, that the very thing objected against in Christianity exists in nature; and that therefore the same God who is the author of nature, may be the author of Christianity. We do not say that any positive evidence can be founded upon this analogy. But in as far as it goes to repel the objection, it is triumphant. A man has no right to retain his theism, if he rejects Christianity upon difficulties to which natural religion is equally liable. If Christianity tells us, that the guilt of a father has brought sufferings and vice upon his posterity, it is what we see exemplified in a thousand instances among the families around us. If it tells us, that the innocent have suffered for the guilty, it is nothing more than what all history and all observation have made perfectly familiar to us. If it tells us of one portion of the human race being distinguished by the sovereign will of the Almighty for superior knowledge, or superior privileges, it only adds one inequality more to the many inequalities which we perceive every day in the gifts of nature, of fortune, and of providence. In short, without entering into all the details of that argument, which Butler has brought forward in a way so masterly and decisive, there is not a single impeachment which can be offered against the God of Christianity, that may not, if consistently proceeded upon, be offered against the God of Nature itself: if the one be unworthy of God, the other is equally so; and if, in spite of these difficulties, you still retain the conviction, that there is a God of Nature, it is not fair or rational to suffer them to outweigh all that positive evidence and testimony which have been adduced for proving that the same God is the God of Christianity also.

## CHAPTER IX.

*On the Way of proposing the Argument to Atheistical Infidels.*

IF Christianity be still resisted, it appears to us that the only consistent refuge is atheism. The very same peculiarities in the dispensation of the gospel, which lead the infidel to reject it as unworthy of God, go to prove that nature is unworthy of him, and land us in the melancholy confusion, that whatever theory can be afforded as to the mysterious origin and existence of the things which be, they are not under the dominion of a supreme and intelligent mind. Nor do we do look upon atheism as a more hopeless species of infidelity than deism, unless in so far as it proves a more stubborn disposition of the heart to resist every religious conviction. Viewed purely as an intellectual subject, we look upon the mind of an atheist as in a better state of preparation for the proofs of Christianity than the mind of the deist. The one is a blank surface, on which evidence may make a fair impression, and where the finger of history may inscribe its credible and well attested information. The other is occupied with preconceptions. It will not take what history offers to it. It puts itself into the same unphilosophical posture, in which the mind of a prejudiced Cartesian opposed its theory of the heavens to the demonstration and measurement of Newton. The theory of the deist upon a subject where truth is still more inaccessible, and speculation still more presumptuous, sets him to resist the only safe and competent evidence that can be appealed to. What was originally the evidence of observation, and is now transformed into the evidence of testimony, comes down to us in a series of historical documents, the closest and most consistent that all antiquity can furnish. It is the unfortunate theory which forms the grand obstacle to the admission of the Christian mi-

racles, and which leads the deist to an exhibition of himself so unphilosophical, as that of trampling on the soundest laws of evidence, by bringing an historical fact under the tribunal of a theoretical principle. The deistical speculation of Rousseau, by which he neutralized the testimony of the first Christians, is as complete a transgression against the temper and principles of true science, as a category of Aristotle when employed to overrule an experiment in chymistry. But however this be, it is evident that Rousseau would have given a readier reception to the gospel history had his mind not been preoccupied with the speculation; and the negative state of atheism would have been more favourable to the admission of those facts which are connected with the origin and establishment of our religion in the world.

This suggests the way in which the evidence for Christianity should be carried home to the mind of an atheist. He sees nothing in the phenomena around him, that can warrant him to believe in the existence of a living and intelligent principle, which gave birth and movement to all things. He does not say that he would refuse credit to the existence of God upon sufficient evidence, but he says that there are not such appearances of design in nature as to supply him with that evidence. He does not deny the existence of God to be a possible truth; but he affirms, that while there is nothing before him but the consciousness of what passes within, and the observation of what passes without, it remains an assertion destitute of proof, and can have no more effect upon his conviction than any other nonentity of the imagination. There is a mighty difference between *not proven* and *disproven*. We see nothing in the argument of the atheist which goes farther than to establish the former sentence upon the question of God's existence. It is altogether an argument *ab ignorantia*; and the same ignorance which restrains them from asserting in positive terms that God exists, equally restrains them from asserting in positive

terms that God does not exist. The assertion may be offered, that, in some distant regions of the creation, there are tracts of space which, instead of being occupied like the tracts around us with suns and planetary systems, teem only with animated beings, who, without being supported like us on the firm surface of a world, have the power of spontaneous movements in free spaces. We cannot say that the assertion is not true, but we can say that it is not proven. It carries in it no positive character either of truth or falsehood, and may therefore be admitted on appropriate and satisfying evidence. But till that evidence comes, the mind is in a state entirely neutral; and such we conceive to be the neutral state of the atheist, as to what he holds to be the unproved assertion of the existence of God.

To the neutral mind of the atheist, then, unfurnished as it is with any previous conception, we offer the historical evidence of Christianity. We do not ask him to presume the existence of God. We ask him to examine the miracles of the New Testament merely as recorded events, and to admit no other principle into the investigation, than those which are held to be satisfying and decisive on any other subject of written testimony. The sweeping principle upon which Rousseau, filled with his own assumptions, condemned the historical evidence for the truth of the gospel narrative, can have no influence on the blank and unoccupied mind of an atheist. He has no presumptions, upon the subject; for to his eyes the phenomena of nature sit so loose and unconnected with that intelligent Being, to whom they have been referred as their origin, that he does not feel himself entitled, from the phenomena, to ascribe any existence, any character, any attributes, or any method of administration to such a Being. He is therefore in the best possible condition for submitting his understanding to the entire impression of the historical evidence. Those difficulties which perplex the deist, who cannot recognise in the God of the New Testament the same features and the same prin-

ciples in which they have invested the God of nature, are no difficulties to him. He has no God of nature to confront with that real though invisible power which lay at the bottom of those astonishing miracles, on which history has stamped her most authentic characters. Though the power which presided there should be an arbitrary, an unjust, or a malignant being, all this may startle a deist, but it will not prevent a consistent atheist from acquiescing in any legitimate inference, to which the miracles of the gospel, viewed in the simple light of historical facts, may chance to carry him. He cannot bring his antecedent information into play upon this question. He professes to have no antecedent information on the subject; and this sense of his entire ignorance, which lies at the bottom of his atheism, would expunge from his mind all that is theoretical, and make it the passive recipient of every thing which observation offers to his notice, or which credible testimony has brought down to it of the history of past ages.

What, then, we ask, does the atheist make of the miracles of the New Testament? If he questions their truth, he must do it upon grounds that are purely historical; he is precluded from every other ground by the very principle on which he has rested his atheism; and we therefore, upon the strength of that testimony which has been already exhibited, press the admission of these miracles as facts. If there be nothing, then, in the ordinary phenomena of nature to infer a God, do these extraordinary phenomena supply him with no argument? Does a voice from heaven make no impression upon him? And we have the best evidence which history can furnish, that such a voice was uttered; "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." We have the evidence of a fact for the existence of that very Being from whom the voice proceeded, and the evidence of a thousand facts for a power superior to nature; because, on the impulse of a volition, it counteracted her laws and processes, it allayed the wind, it gave sight to the blind, health to the diseased, and, at



the utterance of a voice, it gave life to the dead. The ostensible agent in all these wonderful proceedings gave not only credentials of his power, but he gave such credentials of his honesty, as dispose our understanding to receive his explanation of them. We do not avail ourselves of any other principle than what an atheist will acknowledge. He understands as well as we do, the natural signs of veracity which lie in the tone, the manner, the countenance, the high moral expression of worth and benevolence, and, above all, in that firm and undaunted constancy, which neither contempt, nor poverty, nor death, could shift from any of its positions. All these claims upon our belief were accumulated to an unexampled degree in the person of Jesus of Nazareth; and when we couple them with his undoubted miracles, and the manner in which his own personal appearance was followed up by a host of witnesses, who, after a catastrophe which would have proved a death-blow to any cause of imposture, offered themselves to the eye of the public, with the same powers, the same evidence, and the same testimony, it seems impossible to resist his account of the invisible principle, which gave birth and movement to the whole of this wonderful transaction. Whatever atheism we may have founded on the common phenomena around us, here is a new phenomenon which demands our attention,—the testimony of a man who, in addition to evidences of honesty more varied and more satisfying than were ever offered by a brother of the species, had a voice from the clouds, and the power of working miracles, to vouch for him. We do not think the account which this man gives of himself can be viewed either with indifference or distrust, and the account is most satisfying. “I proceeded forth, and came from God.”—“He whom God hath sent, speaketh the words of God.”—“Even as the Father said unto me, so I speak.” He hath elsewhere said that God was his Father. The existence of God is here laid before us, by an evidence altogether distinct from the natural argument, of the

schools; and it may therefore be admitted in spite of the deficiency of that argument. From the same pure and unquestionable source we gather our information of his attributes. "God is true."—"God is a spirit." He is omnipotent, "for with God all things are possible." He is intelligent, "for he knoweth what things we have need of." He sees all things, and he directs all things, "for the very hairs of our heads are numbered," and "a sparrow falleth not to the ground without his permission."

The evidences of the Christian religion are suited to every species of infidelity. We do not ask the atheist to furnish himself with any previous conception. We ask him to come as he is; and upon the strength of his own favourite principle, viewing it as a pure intellectual question, and abstracting from the more unmanageable tendencies of the heart and temper, we conceive his understanding to be in a high state of preparation for taking in Christianity in a far purer and more scriptural form, than can be expected from those whose minds are tainted and preoccupied with their former speculations.

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## CHAPTER X.

### *On the Supreme Authority of Revelation.*

If the New Testament be a message from God, it behoves us to make an entire and unconditional surrender of our minds, to all the duty and to all the information which it sets before us.

There is, perhaps, nothing more thoroughly beyond the cognizance of the human faculties, than the truths of religion, and the ways of that mighty and invisible Being who is the object of it; and yet nothing, we will venture to say, has been made the subject of more hardy and adventurous speculation. We make no allusion at present to deists, who reject the authority of the

New Testament, because the plan and the dispensation of the Almighty which is recorded there, is different from that plan and that dispensation which they have chosen to ascribe to him. We speak of Christians who profess to admit the authority of this record, but who have tainted the purity of their profession by not acting upon its exclusive authority; who have mingled their own thoughts and their own fancy with its information; who, instead of repairing in every question, and in every difficulty, to the principle of "What readest thou," have abridged the sovereignty of this principle, by appealing to others, of which we undertake to make out the incompetency; who, in addition to the word of God, talk also of the reason of the thing, or the standard of orthodoxy; and have in fact brought down the Bible from the high place which belongs to it, as the only tribunal to which the appeal should be made, or from which the decision should be looked for.

But it is not merely among partisans or the advocates of a system, that we meet with this indifference to the authority of what is written. It lies at the bottom of a great deal of that looseness, both in practice and speculation, which we meet with every day in society, and which we often hear expressed in familiar conversation. Whence that list of maxims which are so indolently conceived, but which, at the same time, are so faithfully proceeded upon? "We have all our passions and infirmities; but we have honest hearts, and that will make up for them. Men are not all cast in the same mould. God will not call us to task too rigidly for our foibles; at least this is our opinion, and God can never be so unmerciful, or so unjust, as to bring us to a severe and unforgiving tribunal for the mistakes of the understanding." Now it is not licentiousness in general which we are speaking against. It is against that sanction which it appears to derive from the self-formed maxims of him who is guilty of it. It is against the principle, that either an error of doctrine, or an indulgence of passion, is to be exempted

from condemnation, because it has an opinion of the mind to give it countenance and authority. What we complain of is, that a man no sooner sets himself forward and says, "this is my sentiment," than he conceives that all culpability is taken away from the error, either of practice or speculation, into which he has fallen. The carelessness with which the opinion has been formed is of no account in the estimate. It is the mere existence of the opinion, which is pleaded in vindication; and under the authority of *our maxim, and our mode of thinking*, every man conceives himself to have a right to his own way and his own peculiarity.

Now this might be all very fair were there no Bible and no revelation in existence. But it is not fair, that all this looseness, and all this variety, should be still floating in the world, in the face of an authoritative communication from God himself. Had no message come to us from the Fountain-head of truth, it were natural enough for every individual mind to betake itself to its own speculation. But a message has come to us, bearing on its forehead every character of authenticity; and is it right now, that the question of our faith, or of our duty, should be committed to the capricious variations of this man's taste, or of that man's fancy? Our maxim, and our sentiment! God has put an authoritative stop to all this. He has spoken, and the right or the liberty of speculation no longer remains to us. The question now is, not "What thinkest thou?" In the days of pagan antiquity, no other question could be put; and to the wretched delusions and idolatries of that period let us see what kind of answer the human mind is capable of making, when left to its own guidance, and its own authority. But we call ourselves Christians, and profess to receive the Bible as the directory of our faith; and the only question in which we are concerned, is, "What is written in the law? how readest thou?"

But there is a way of escaping from this conclusion. No man calling himself a Christian will ever disown

in words the authority of the Bible. Whatever be counted the genuine interpretation, it must be submitted to. But in the act of coming to this interpretation, it will be observed, there is room for the unwarrantable principles which we are attempting to expose. The business of a Scripture critic is to give a fair representation of the sense of all its passages as they exist in the original. Now, this is a process which requires some investigation, and it is during the time that this process is carrying on, that the tendencies and antecedent opinions of the mind are suffered to mislead the inquirer from the true principles of the business in which he is employed. The mind and meaning of the author, who is translated, is purely a question of language, and should be decided upon no other principles than those of grammar or philology. Now, what we complain of is, that while this principle is recognised and acted upon in every other composition which has come down to us from antiquity, it has been most glaringly departed from in the case of the Bible; that the meaning of its author, instead of being made singly and entirely a question of grammar, has been made a question of metaphysics, or a question of sentiment; that instead of the argument resorted to being "such must be the rendering from the structure of the language, and the import and significancy of its phrases," it has been, "such must be the rendering from the analogy of the faith, the reason of the thing, the character of the Divine mind, and the wisdom of all his dispensations." And whether this argument be formally insisted upon or not, we have still to complain, that in reality it has a most decided influence on the understanding of many a Christian; and in this way, the creed which exists in his mind, instead of being a fair transcript of the New Testament, is the result of a compromise which has been made between its authoritative decisions and the speculations of his own fancy.

What is the reason why there is so much more unanimity among critics and grammarians about the

sense of any ancient author, than about the sense of the New Testament? Because the one is made purely a question of criticism: the other has been complicated with the uncertain fancies of a daring and presumptuous theology. Could we only dismiss these fancies, sit down like a schoolboy to his task, and look upon the study of divinity as a mere work of translation, then we would expect the same unanimity among Christians that we meet with among scholars and literati about the system of Epicurus or the philosophy of Aristotle. But here lies the distinction between the two cases. When we make out, by a critical examination of the Greek of Aristotle, that such was his meaning, and such his philosophy, the result carries no authority with it, and our mind retains the congenial liberty of its own speculations. But if we make out by a critical examination of the Greek of St. Paul, that such is the theology of the New Testament, we are bound to submit to this theology; and our minds must surrender every opinion, however dear to it. It is quite in vain to talk of the mysteriousness of the subject, as being the cause of the want of unanimity among Christians. It may be mysterious, in reference to our former conceptions. It may be mysterious in the utter impossibility of reconciling it with our own assumed fancies and self-formed principles. It may be mysterious in the difficulty which we feel in comprehending the manner of the doctrine, when we ought to be satisfied with the authoritative revelation which has been made to us of its existence and its truth. But if we could only abandon all our former conceptions, if we felt that our business was to submit to the oracles of God, and that we are not called upon to effect a reconciliation between a revealed doctrine of the Bible, and an assumed or excogitated principle of our own;—then we are satisfied, that we would find the language of the Testament to have as much clear, and precise, and didactic simplicity, as the language of any sage or philosopher that has come down to us.

Could we only get it reduced to a mere question of language, we should look, at no distant period, for the establishment of a pure and unanimous Christianity in the world. But, no. While the mind and the meaning of any philosopher is collected from his words, and these words tried, as to their import and significance, upon the appropriate principles of criticism, the mind and the meaning of the Spirit of God is not collected upon the same pure and competent principles of investigation. In order to know the mind of the Spirit, the communications of the Spirit, and the expression of these communications in written language, should be consulted. These are the only data upon which the inquiry should be instituted. But, no. Instead of learning the designs and character of the Almighty from his own mouth, we sit in judgment upon them, and make our conjecture of what they should be take the precedency of his revelation of what they are. We do him the same injustice that we do to an acquaintance, whose proceedings and whose intentions we venture to pronounce upon, while we refuse him a hearing, or turn away from the letter in which he explains himself. No wonder, then, at the want of unanimity among Christians, so long as the question of "What thinkest thou?" is made the principle of their creed, and, for the safe guidance of criticism, they have committed themselves to the endless caprices of the human intellect. Let the principle of "what thinkest thou" be exploded, and that of "what readest thou" be substituted in its place. Let us take our lesson as the Almighty places it before us, and, instead of being the judge of his conduct, be satisfied with the safer and humbler office of being the interpreter of his language.

Now this principle is not exclusively applicable to the learned. The great bulk of Christians have no access to the Bible in its original languages; but they have access to the common translation, and they may be satisfied by the concurrent testimony of the learned

among the different sectaries of this country, that the translation is a good one. We do not confine the principle to critics and translators; we press it upon all. We call upon them not to form their divinity by independent thinking, but to receive it by obedient reading; to take the words as they stand, and submit to the plain English of the Scriptures which lie before them. It is the office of a translator to give a faithful representation of the original. Now that this faithful representation has been given, it is our part to peruse it with care, and to take a fair and a faithful impression of it. It is our part to purify our understanding of all its previous conceptions. We must bring a free and unoccupied mind to the exercise. It must not be the pride or the obstinacy of self-formed opinions, or the haughty independence of him who thinks he has reached the manhood of his understanding. We must bring with us the docility of a child, if we want to gain the kingdom of heaven. It must not be a partial, but an entire and unexcepted obedience. There must be no garbling of that which is entire, no darkening of that which is luminous, no softening down of that which is authoritative or severe. The Bible will allow of no compromise. It professes to be the directory of our faith, and claims a total ascendancy over the souls and the understandings of men. It will enter into no composition with us, or our natural principles. It challenges the whole mind as its due, and it appeals to the truth of heaven for the high authority of its sanctions. "Whosoever addeth to, or taketh from, the words of this book, is accursed," is the absolute language in which it delivers itself. This brings us to its terms. There is no way of escaping after this. We must bring every thought into the captivity of its obedience, and as closely as ever lawyer stuck to his document or his extract, must we abide by the rule and the doctrine which this authentic memorial of God sets before us.

Now we hazard the assertion, that with a number



of professing Christians, there is not this unexcepted submission of the understanding to the authority of the Bible; and that the authority of the Bible is often modified, and in some cases superseded by the authority of other principles. One of these principles is the reason of the thing. We do not know if this principle would be at all felt or appealed to by the earliest Christians. It may perhaps by the disputations or the philosophising among converted Jews and Greeks, but not certainly by those of whom Paul said, that "not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, were called." They turned from dumb idols to serve the living and the true God. There was nothing in their antecedent theology which they could have any respect for: nothing which they could confront, or bring into competition with the doctrines of the New Testament. In those days, the truth as it is in Jesus came to the minds of its disciples, recommended by its novelty, by its grandeur, by the power and recency of its evidences, and above all by its vast and evident superiority over the fooleries of a degrading paganism. It does not occur to us, that men in these circumstances would ever think of sitting in judgment over the mysteries of that sublime faith which had charmed them into an abandonment of their earlier religion. It rather strikes us, that they would receive them passively; that, like scholars who had all to learn, they would take their lesson as they found it; that the information of their teachers would be enough for them; and that the restless tendency of the human mind to speculation would for a time find ample enjoyment in the rich and splendid discoveries which broke like a flood of light upon the world. But we are in different circumstances. To us, these discoveries, rich and splendid as they are, have lost the freshness of novelty. The Sun of righteousness, like the sun of the firmament, has become familiarized to us by possession. In a few ages, the human mind deserted its guidance, and rambled as

much as ever in quest of new speculations. It is true, that they took a juster and loftier flight since the days of heathenism. But it was only because they walked in the light of revelation. They borrowed of the New Testament without acknowledgment, and took its beauties and its truths to deck their own wretched fancies and self-constituted systems. In the process of time, the delusion multiplied and extended. Schools were formed, and the ways of the Divinity were as confidently theorized upon, as the processes of chymistry, or the economy of the heavens. Universities were endowed, and natural theology took its place in the circle of the sciences. Folios were written, and the respected luminaries of a former age poured their *a priori* and their *a posteriori* demonstrations on the world. Taste, and sentiment, and imagination grew apace; and every raw untutored principle which poetry could clothe in prettiness, or over which the hand of genius could throw the graces of sensibility and elegance, was erected into a principle of the divine government, and made to preside over the counsels of the Deity. In the mean time, the Bible, which ought to supersede all, was itself superseded. It was quite in vain to say that it was the only authentic record of an actual embassy which God had sent into the world. It was quite in vain to plead its testimonies, its miracles, and the unquestionable fulfilment of its prophecies. These mighty claims must lie over, and be suspended, till we have settled—what? the reasonableness of its doctrines. We must bring the theology of God's ambassador to the bar of our self-formed theology. The Bible, instead of being admitted as the directory of our faith upon its external evidences, must be tried upon the merits of the work itself; and if our verdict be favourable, it must be brought in, not as a help to our ignorance, but as a corollary to our demonstrations. But is this ever done? Yes! by Dr. Samuel Clarke, and a whole host of followers and admirers. Their first step in the process of theological study, is to fur-

nish their minds with the principles of natural theology. Christianity, before its external proofs are looked at or listened to, must be brought under the tribunal of these principles. All the difficulties which attach to the reason of the thing, or the fitness of the doctrines, must be formally discussed, and satisfactorily got over. A voice was heard from heaven, saying of Jesus Christ, "This is my beloved Son, hear ye him." The men of Galilee saw him ascend from the dead to the heaven which he now occupies. The men of Galilee gave their testimony; and it is a testimony which stood the fiery trial of persecution in a former age, and of sophistry in this. And yet, instead of hearing Jesus Christ as disciples, they sit in authority over him as judges. Instead of forming their divinity after the Bible, they try the Bible by their antecedent divinity; and this book, with all its mighty train of evidences, must drivel in their anti-chambers, till they have pronounced sentence of admission, when they have got its doctrines to agree with their own airy and unsubstantial speculations.

We do not condemn the exercise of reason in matters of theology. It is the part of reason to form its conclusions, when it has data and evidences before it. But it is equally the part of reason to abstain from its conclusions, when these evidences are wanting. Reason can judge of the external evidences for Christianity, because it can discern the merits of human testimony: and it can perceive the truth or the falsehood of such obvious credentials as the performance of a miracle, or the fulfilment of a prophecy. But reason is not entitled to sit in judgment over those internal evidences, which many a presumptuous theologian has attempted to derive from the reason of the thing, or from the agreement of the doctrine with the fancied character and attributes of the Deity. One of the most useful exercises of reason, is to ascertain its limits, and to keep within them; to abandon the fields of conjecture, and to restrain itself within that safe

and certain barrier which forms the boundary of human experience. However humiliating you may conceive it, it is this which lies at the bottom of Lord Bacon's philosophy, and it is to this that modern science is indebted for all her solidity and all her triumphs. Why does philosophy flourish in our days? Because her votaries have learned to abandon their own creative speculations, and to submit to evidence, let her conclusions be as painful and as unpalatable as they will. Now all that we want is to carry the same lesson and the same principle into theology. Our business is, not to guess, but to learn. After we have established Christianity to be an authentic message from God upon those historical grounds on which the reason and experience of man entitle him to form his conclusions, nothing remains for us but an unconditional surrender of the mind to the subject of the message. We have a right to sit in judgment over the credentials of heaven's ambassador, but we have no right to sit in judgment over the information he gives us. We have no right either to refuse or to modify that information, till we have accommodated it to our previous conceptions.

It is very true that if the truths which he delivered lay within the field of human observation, he brings himself under the tribunal of our antecedent knowledge. Were he tell us, that the bodies of the planetary system moved in orbits which are purely circular, we would oppose to him the observations and measurements of astronomy. Were he to tell us, that in winter the sun never shone, and that in summer no cloud ever darkened the brilliancy of his career, we would oppose to him the certain remembrances, both of ourselves and of our whole neighbourhood. Were he to tell us that we were perfect men, because we were free from passion, and loved our neighbours as ourselves, we should oppose to him the history of our own lives, and the deeply-seated consciousness of our own infirmities. On all these subjects, we can con-

front him; but when he brings truth from a quarter which no human eye ever explored; when he tells us the mind of the Deity, and brings before us the counsels of that invisible Being, whose arm is abroad upon all worlds, and whose views reach to eternity, he is beyond the ken of eye or of telescope, and we must submit to him. We have no more right to sit in judgment over his information, than we have to sit in judgment over the information of any other visiter, who lights upon our planet, from some distant and unknown part of the universe, and tells us what worlds roll in those remote tracts which are beyond the limits of our astronomy, and how the Divinity peoples them with wonders. Any previous conceptions of ours are of no more value than the fooleries of an infant; and should we offer to resist or to modify upon the strength of these conceptions, we would be as unsound and as unphilosophical as ever schoolman was with his categories, or Cartesian with his whirlpools of ether.

Let us go back to the first Christians of the gentile world. They turned from dumb idols to serve the living and the true God. They made a simple and entire transition from a state as bad, if not worse, than that of entire ignorance, to the Christianity of the New Testament. Their previous conceptions, instead of helping them, behooved to be utterly abandoned; nor was there that intermediate step which so many of us think to be necessary, and which we dignify with the name of the rational theology of nature. In those days this rational theology was unheard of; nor have we the slightest reason to believe that they were initiated into its doctrines, before they were looked upon as fit to be taught the peculiarities of the gospel. They were translated at once from the absurdities of paganism to that Christianity which has come down to us in the records of the evangelical history, and the epistles which their teachers addressed to them. They saw the miracles; they acquiesced in them, as satisfying credentials of an inspired teacher; they took the

whole of their religion from his mouth; their faith came by hearing, and hearing by the words of a divine messenger. This was their process, and it ought to be ours. We do not see the miracles, but we see their reality through the medium of that clear and unsuspecting testimony which has been handed down to us. We should admit them as the credentials of an embassy from God. We should take the whole of our religion from the records of this embassy; and, renouncing the idolatry of our own self-formed conceptions, we should repair to that word which was spoken to them that heard it, and transmitted to us by the instrumentality of written language. The question with them was, What hearest thou? The question with us is, What readest thou? They had their idols, and they turned away from them. We have our fancies, and we contend, that, in the face of an authoritative revelation from heaven, it is as glaring idolatry in us to adhere to them, as it would be were they spread out upon canvass, or chiselled into material form by the hands of a statuary.

In the popular religions of antiquity, we see scarcely the vestige of a resemblance to that academical theism which is delivered in our schools, and figures away in the speculations of our moralists. The process of conversion among the first Christians was a very simple one. It consisted of an utter abandonment of their heathenism, and an entire submission to those new truths which came to them through the revelation of the gospel, and through it only. It was the pure theology of Christ and of his apostles. That theology which struts in fancied demonstration from a professor's chair, formed no part of it. They listened as if they had all to learn: we listen as if it was our office to judge, and to give the message of God its due place and subordination among the principles which we had previously established. Now these principles were utterly unknown at the first publication of Christianity. The Galatians, and Corinthians, and Thessalonians, and Philippians had no conception of them. And yet, will

any man say, that either Paul himself, or those who lived under his immediate tuition, had not enough to make them accomplished Christians, or that they fell short of our enlightened selves in the wisdom which prepares for eternity, because they wanted our rational theology as a stepping-stone to that knowledge which came, in pure and immediate revelation, from the Son of God? The gospel was enough for them, and it should be enough for us also. Every natural or assumed principle, which offers to abridge its supremacy, or even so much as to share with it in authority and direction, should be instantly discarded. Every opinion in religion should be reduced to the question of, What readest thou? and the Bible be asquiesced in, and submitted to, as the alone directory of our faith, where we can get the whole will of God for the salvation of man.

But is not this an enlightened age? and, since the days of the gospel, has not the wisdom of two thousand years accumulated upon the present generation? has not science been enriched by discovery? and is not theology one of the sciences? Are the men of this advanced period to be restrained from the high exercise of their powers? and, because the men of a remote and barbarous antiquity lisped and drivelled in the infancy of their acquirements, is that any reason why we should be restricted like so many schoolboys to the lesson that is set before us? It is all true that this is a very enlightened age; but on what field has it acquired so flattering a distinction? On the field of experiment. The human mind owes all its progress to the confinement of its efforts within the safe and certain limits of observation, and to the severe restraint which it has imposed upon its speculative tendencies. Go beyond these limits, and the human mind has not advanced a single inch by its own independent exercises. All the philosophy which has been reared by the labour of successive ages, is the philosophy of facts reduced to general laws, or brought under a

general description from observed points of resemblance. A proud and wonderful fabric we do allow; but we throw away the very instrument by which it was built the moment that we cease to observe, and begin to theorise and excogitate. Tell us a single discovery which has thrown a particle of light on the details of the divine administration. Tell us a single truth in the whole field of experimental science, which can bring us to the moral government of the Almighty by any other road than his own revelation.

Astronomy has taken millions of suns and of systems within its ample domain; but the ways of God to man stand at a distance as inaccessible as ever; nor has it shed so much as a glimmering over the counsels of that mighty and invisible Being, who sits in high authority over all worlds. The boasted discoveries of modern science are all confined to that field within which the senses of man can expatiate. The moment we go beyond this field, they cease to be discoveries, and are the mere speculations of the fancy. The discoveries of modern science have, in fact, imparted a new energy to the sentiment in question. They all serve to exalt the Deity, but they do not contribute a single iota to the explanation of his purposes. They make him greater, but they do not make him more comprehensible. He is more shrouded in mystery than ever. It is not himself whom we see, it is his workmanship; and every new addition to its grandeur or to its variety, which philosophy opens to our contemplation, throws our understanding at a greater distance than before from the mind and conception of the sublime Architect. Instead of the God of a single world, we now see him presiding, in all the majesty of his high attributes, over a mighty range of innumerable systems. To our little eye he is wrapt in more awful mysteriousness, and every new glimpse which astronomy gives us of the universe magnifies, to the apprehension of our mind, that impassable barrier which stands between the counsels of its Sovereign,



and those fugitive beings who strut their evanescent hour in the humblest of its mansions. If this invisible Being would only break that mysterious silence in which he has wrapt himself, we feel that a single word from his mouth would be worth a world of darkling speculations. Every new triumph which the mind of man achieves in the field of discovery, binds us more firmly to our Bible; and by the very proportion in which philosophy multiplies the wonders of God, do we prize that book, on which the evidence of history has stamped the character of his authentic communication.

The course of the moon in the heavens has exercised astronomers for a long series of ages, and now that they are able to assign all the irregularities of its period, it may be counted one of the most signal triumphs of the modern philosophy.

The question lay within the limits of the field of observation. It was accessible to measurement, and upon the sure principles of calculation, men of science have brought forward the confident solution of a problem, the most difficult and trying that ever was submitted to the human intellect. But let it never be forgotten, that those very maxims of philosophy which guided them so surely and so triumphantly within the field of observation, also restrained them from stepping beyond it; and though none were more confident than they, whenever they had evidence and experiment to enlighten them, yet none were more scrupulous in abstaining to pronounce upon any subject, where evidence and experiment were wanting. Let us suppose that one of their number, flushed with the triumph of success, passed on from the work of calculating the periods of the moon, to theorise upon its chymical constitution. The former question lies within the field of observation, the other is most thoroughly beyond it; and there is not a man, whose mind is disciplined to the rigour and sobriety of modern science, that would not look upon the theory with the same contempt, as

if it were the dream of a poet, or the amusement of a schoolboy. We have heard much of the moon, and of the volcanoes which blaze upon its surface. Let us have incontestible evidence, that a falling stone proceeds from the eruption of one of those volcanoes, and the chymistry of the moon will receive more illustration from the analysis of that stone, than from all the speculations of the theorists. It brings the question in part within the limits of observation. It now becomes a fair subject for the exercise of the true philosophy. The eye can now see, and the hand can now handle it; and the information furnished by the laborious drudgery of experimental men will be received as a truer document, than the theory of any philosopher, however ingenious, or however splendid.

At the hazard of being counted fanciful, we bring forward the above as a competent illustration of the principle which we are attempting to establish. We do all homage to modern science, nor do we dispute the loftiness of its pretensions. But we maintain, that however brilliant its career in those tracks of philosophy where it has the light of observation to conduct it, the philosophy of all that lies without the field of observation is as obscure and inaccessible as ever. We maintain, that to pass from the motions of the moon to an unauthorized speculation upon the chymistry of its materials, is a presumption disowned by philosophy. We ought to feel, that it would be a still more glaring transgression of all her maxims, to pass from the brightest discovery in her catalogue, to the ways of that mysterious Being, whom no eye hath seen, and whose mind is capacious as infinity. The splendour and the magnitude of what we do know can never authorize us to pronounce upon what we do not know; nor can we conceive a transition more violent or more unwarrantable, than to pass from the truths of natural science to a speculation on the details of God's administration, or on the economy of his moral government. We hear much of revelations from heaven.

Let any one of these bear the evidence of an actual communication from God himself, and all the reasonings of all theologians must vanish, and give place to the substance of this communication. Instead of theorising upon the nature and properties of that divine light which irradiates the throne of God, and exists at so immeasurable a distance from our faculties, let us point our eyes to that emanation which has actually come down to us. Instead of theorising upon the counsels of the divine mind, let us go to that volume which lighted upon our world nearly two thousand years ago, and which bears the most authentic evidence, that it is the depository of part of these counsels. Let us apply the proper instrument to this examination. Let us never conceive it to be a work of speculation or fancy. It is a pure work of grammatical analysis. It is an unmixed question of language. The commentator who opens this book with the one hand, and carries his system in the other, has nothing to do with it. We admit of no other instrument than the vocabulary and the lexicon. The man whom we look to is the Scripture critic, who can appeal to his authorities for the import and significance of phrases, and whatever be the strict result of his patience and profound philology, we submit to it. We call upon every enlightened disciple of Lord Bacon to approve the steps of this process, and to acknowledge, that the same habits of philosophising to which science is indebted for all her elevation in these latter days, will lead us to cast down all our lofty imaginations, and bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.

But something more remains to be done. The mind may have discernment enough to acquiesce in the speculative justness of a principle; but it may not have vigour or consistency enough to put it into execution. Lord Bacon pointed out the method of true philosophising; yet, in practice, he abandoned it, and his own physical investigations may be ranked among the most effectual specimens of that rash and unfounded theo-

rising, which his own principles have banished from the schools of philosophy. Sir Isaac Newton completed in his own person the character of the true philosopher. He not only saw the general principle, but he obeyed it. He both betook himself to the drudgery of observation, and he endured the pain which every mind must suffer in the act of renouncing its old habits of conception. We call upon our readers to have manhood and philosophy enough to make a similar sacrifice. It is not enough that the Bible be acknowledged as the only authentic source of information respecting the details of that moral economy, which the Supreme Being has instituted for the government of the intelligent beings who occupy this globe. Its authenticity must be something more than acknowledged. It must be felt, and, in act and obedience, submitted to. Let us put them to the test. "Verily I say unto you," says our Saviour, "unless a man shall be born again, he shall not enter into the kingdom of God." "By grace ye are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." "Justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood." We need not multiply quotations; but if there be any repugnance to the obvious truths which we have announced to the reader in the language of the Bible, his mind is not yet tutored to the philosophy of the subject. It may be in the way, but the final result is not yet arrived at. It is still a slave to the elegance or the plausibility of its old speculations; and though it admits the principle, that every previous opinion must give way to the supreme authority of an actual communication from God, it wants consistency and hardihood to carry the principle into accomplishment.

# REMARKS

## ON THE

### NATURE OF TESTIMONY.

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FROM DOCTOR ABERCROMBIE'S INQUIRIES CONCERNING THE INTEL-  
LECTUAL POWERS AND THE INVESTIGATION OF TRUTH.

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#### *Rules by which we estimate the Credibility of Testimony.*

A VERY small portion of our knowledge of external things is obtained through our own senses: by far the greater part is procured through other men, and this is received by us on the evidence of testimony. But, in receiving facts in this manner, we usually proceed with more caution than when they come to us by our personal observation. We are much influenced, in the first place, by our confidence in the veracity of the narrator, and our knowledge of the opportunities which he has had of ascertaining the facts he professes to relate. Thus, if he be a person on whose testimony we have formerly received important statements, which have turned out to be correct, we are the more ready to receive his testimony again; if he be a stranger to us, we receive it with greater caution: if he has formerly misled us, we view it with suspicion, or reject it altogether.

But there is another principle of very extensive application in such cases, and which is independent in a great measure of the character of the narrator. In receiving facts upon testimony, we are much influenced by their accordance with facts with which we are already acquainted; this is what, in common language, we call

their probability; and statements which are probable, that is, in accordance with facts which we already know, are received upon a lower degree of evidence than those which are not in such accordance, or which, in other words, appear to us in the present state of our knowledge to be improbable. Now this is a sound and salutary caution, but we should beware of allowing it to influence us beyond its proper sphere. It should lead us to examine carefully the evidence upon which we receive facts, not in accordance with those which we have already acquired; but we should beware of allowing it to engender skepticism. For, while an unbounded credulity is the part of a weak mind, which never thinks or reasons at all, an unlimited skepticism is the part of a contracted mind, which reasons upon imperfect data, or makes its own knowledge and extent of observation the standard and test of probability. An ignorant peasant may reject the testimony of a philosopher in regard to the size of the moon, because he thinks he has the evidence of his senses that it is only a foot in diameter; and a person holding a respectable rank in society, is said to have received with contempt the doctrine of the revolution of the earth on its axis, because he was perfectly satisfied that his house was never known to turn with its front to the north. When the King of Siam was told by a Dutch traveller that in Holland, at certain seasons of the year, water becomes so solid that an elephant might walk over it, he replied, "I have believed many extraordinary things which you have told me, because I took you for a man of truth and veracity, but now I am convinced that you lie." This confidence in one's own experience, as the test of probability, characterizes a mind which is confined in its views and limited in its acquirements; and the tendency of it would be the rejection of all knowledge, for which we have not the evidence of our senses. Had the King of Siam once seen water in a frozen state, he would not only have been put right in regard to this fact, but his confidence would have been

shaken in his own experience as the test of probability in other things; and he would have been more disposed for the further reception of truth upon the evidence of testimony.

Thus, progress in knowledge is not confined in its results to the mere facts which we acquire, but has also an extensive influence in enlarging the mind for the further reception of truth, and setting it free from many of those prejudices which influence men who are limited by a narrow field of observation. There may even be cases in which, without any regard to the veracity of the narrator, a cultivated mind perceives the elements of truth in a statement which is rejected by inferior minds as altogether incredible. An ingenious writer supposes a traveller of rather doubtful veracity bringing into the country of Archimedes an account of the steam-engine. His statement is rejected by his countrymen as altogether incredible. It is entirely at variance with their experience, and they think it much more probable that the traveller should lie, than that such a thing should be. But when he describes to Archimedes the arrangement of the machine, the philosopher perceives the result, and, without any consideration of the veracity of the narrator, decides, upon the evidence derived from the relation of the facts themselves, and their accordance with principles which are known to him, that the statement is unquestionably true.

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*Confidence in Testimony in regard to Statements at variance with our personal Observation or Experience.*

THIS illustration leads to a principle of the utmost practical importance. In judging of the credibility of a statement, we are not to be influenced simply by our actual experience of similar events; for this would limit our reception of new facts to their accordance

with those which we already know. We must extend our views much farther than this, and proceed upon the knowledge which we have derived from other sources, of the powers and properties of the agent to which the event is ascribed. It is on this principle that the account of the steam-engine would have appeared probable to Archimedes, while it was rejected by his countrymen as absolutely incredible; because he would have judged, not according to his experience of similar machinery, but according to his knowledge of the powers and properties of steam. In the same manner when the king of Siam rejected, as an incredible falsehood, the account of the freezing of water, if there had been at his court a philosopher who had attended to the properties of heat, he would have judged in a different manner, though the actual fact of the freezing of water might have been as new to him as it was to the king. He would have recollected that he had seen various solid bodies rendered fluid by the application of heat; and that, on the abstraction of the additional heat, they again became solid. He would have thus argued the possibility, that, by a further abstraction of heat, bodies might become solid which are fluid in the ordinary temperature of the atmosphere. In this manner, the fact, which was rejected by the king, judging from his own experience, might have been received by the philosopher, judging from his knowledge of the powers and properties of heat—though he had acquired this knowledge from events apparently far removed from that to which he now applied it.

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*Objections which have been made to the Reception of such Statements on the Evidence of Testimony.*

THE principle here referred to is independent altogether of the direct reliance which we have on testimony, in regard to things which are at variance with



our experience, when we are satisfied that the testimony has the characters of credibility; but, even on these grounds, we may perceive the fallacy of that application of the doctrine of probability which has been employed by some writers, in opposition to the truths of revealed religion and to the means by which they were promulgated—particularly the miracles of the sacred writings. Miracles, they contend, are deviations from the established course of nature, and are consequently, contrary to our uniform experience. It accords with our experience that men should lie, and even that several men might concur in propagating the same lie; and, therefore, it is more probable that the narrators lied, than that the statement respecting miracles is true. Mr. Hume even went so far as to maintain, that a miracle is so contrary to what is founded upon firm and unalterable experience, that it cannot be established by any human testimony.

The fallacy of this argument may probably be maintained from the principles which have been stated. It is, in fact, the same mode of reasoning which induced the king of Siam to reject the statement of water becoming solid. This was entirely contradicted by his "firm and unalterable experience," and, therefore, could not be received, even upon the evidence of a man whom he had already recognised as a witness of unquestionable veracity, and upon whose single testimony he had received as truth "many extraordinary things." He thought it much more probable that even this man lied, than that such a statement could be true. Strictly speaking, indeed, the objection of Mr. Hume may be considered as little better than a play upon words. For what renders an occurrence miraculous is precisely the fact of its being opposed to uniform experience. To say therefore that miracles are incredible because they are contrary to experience is merely to say that they are incredible because they are miracles.



*Fallacy of these Objections, and Grounds of our Confidence in Testimony.*

THEY who are imposed upon by such a sophism as this do not, in the first place, attend to the fact that the term experience, if so much is to be founded upon it, must be limited to the personal observation of every individual; that is, it can apply, in each particular case, only to the last fifty or sixty years at most, and to events which have happened during that period, at the spot where the individual was present. Whatever he knows of events which took place beyond this spot, or before that period, he knows, not from experience, but entirely from testimony: and a great part of our knowledge, of what we call the established course of nature, has been acquired in this manner. In the reception of new knowledge, then, an individual must either receive facts upon testimony, or believe nothing but that for which he has the evidence of his senses. It is unnecessary to state how much the latter supposition is at variance with the daily practice of every man; and how much information we are in the constant habit of receiving upon testimony, even in regard to things which are very much at variance with our personal observation. How many facts do we receive in this manner, with unsuspecting confidence, on the testimony of the historian, in regard to the occurrences of ancient times; and on the testimony of the naturalist and the traveller, respecting the natural and civil history of foreign countries. How few persons have verified, by their personal observation, the wonders which we receive on the testimony of the astronomer; and, even of the great phenomena of nature on the surface of our globe, how much do we receive upon testimony in regard to things which are widely at variance with our own experience. I need only mention the boiling springs of Iceland, and the phenomena of earthquakes and volcanoes. But, on the principles of Mr. Hume, these could not be believed.

On the contrary, if one of our intelligent Highlanders were hearing described to him the devastations of a volcano, he would point to his heath-covered mountain, as the basis of his "firm and unalterable experience," and declare it to be more probable that travellers should lie than that such a statement could be true.

The reception of facts upon the evidence of testimony must therefore be considered as a fundamental principle of our nature, to be acted upon whenever we are satisfied that the testimony possesses certain characters of credibility. These are chiefly referable to three heads: that the individual has had sufficient opportunity of ascertaining the facts; that we have confidence in his power of judging of their accuracy; and that we have no suspicion of his being influenced by passion or prejudice in his testimony,—or, in other words, that we believe him to be an honest witness. Our confidence is further strengthened by several witnesses concurring in the same testimony, each of whom has had the same opportunities of ascertaining the facts, and presents the same characters of truth and honesty. On such testimony, we are in the constant habit of receiving statements which are much beyond the sphere of our personal observation, and widely at variance with our experience. These are the statements which, for the sake of a name, we may call marvellous. In regard to such, the foundation of incredulity, as we have seen, is generally ignorance; and it is interesting to trace the principles by which a man of cultivated mind is influenced in receiving upon testimony statements which are rejected by the vulgar as totally incredible.

1. He is influenced by the recollection that many things at one time appeared to him marvellous which he now knows to be true: and he thence concludes that there may still be in nature many phenomena and many principles with which he is entirely unacquainted. In other words, he has learned from experience not to make his own knowledge his test of probability.

2. He is greatly influenced by perceiving in the statement some element of probability, or any kind of sequence or relation by which the alleged fact may be connected with principles which are known to him. It is in this manner that the freezing of water, which was rejected by the king of Siam as an incredible falsehood, might have appeared credible to a philosopher who had attended to the properties of heat, because he would have perceived in the statement a chain of relations connecting it with facts which he knew to be true.

3. He is much guided by his power of discriminating the credibility of testimony, or of distinguishing that species and that amount of it which he feels to be unworthy of absolute credit from that on which he relies with as implicit confidence as on the uniformity of the course of nature. The vulgar mind is often unable to make the necessary discrimination in this respect, and therefore is apt to fall into one of the extremes of credulity and skepticism. Mr. Hume, indeed, himself admits that there is a certain amount of testimony on which he would receive a statement widely at variance with his own uniform experience, as in the hypothetical case which he proposes,—the account of a total darkness over the whole earth continuing for eight days two hundred years ago. The evidence which he requires for it is simply the concurrence of testimonies,—namely, that all authors in all languages describe the event; and that travellers bring accounts from all quarters of traditions of the occurrence being still strong and lively among the people. On such evidence he admits that philosophers ought to receive it as certain.

These principles may be considered as the elements of our belief in regard to statements which are new to us; and it is interesting to remark how they balance and compensate each other. Thus, a statement which appears probable, or can be readily referred to known relations, is received upon a lower degree of testimony, as in the illustration respecting Archimedes and the steam-engine. Others, which we find greater difficulty

in referring to any known principle, we may receive upon a certain amount of testimony which we feel to be worthy of absolute confidence. But there may be others of so very extraordinary a kind, and so far removed from or even opposed to every known principle, that we may hesitate in receiving them upon any kind of testimony, unless we can discover in relation to them something on which the mind can fix as an element of moral probability.

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*Distinction between those Events which are marvellous and those which are miraculous.*

THIS leads us to a very obvious distinction of extraordinary events,—into those which are only marvellous, and those which are to be considered miraculous. A marvellous event is one which differs in all its elements from any thing that we previously knew, without being opposed to any known principle. But a miraculous event implies much more than this, being directly opposed to what every man knows to be the established and uniform course of nature. It is further required that such an event shall be of so obvious and palpable a kind that every man is qualified to judge of its miraculous character, or is convinced it could not happen from the operation of any ordinary natural cause.

In receiving a statement respecting such an event, we require the highest species of testimony, or that on which we rely with the same confidence as on the uniformity of the course of nature itself. But even with this amount of testimony a doubt may still remain. For we have two amounts of probability which are equally balanced against each other; namely, the probability that such testimony should not deceive us, and the probability that there should be no deviation from the course of nature. The concurring evidence of numerous credible witnesses, indeed, gives a decided preponderance to the testimony; and upon a certain

amount of testimony we might receive any statement however improbable—as in the case admitted by Mr. Hume of a universal darkness. But, though in such a case we might receive the statement as a fact which we could not dispute, the mind would be left in a state of absolute suspense and uncertainty in regard to any judgment which we could form respecting it. Something more appears to be necessary for fixing the distinct belief of a miraculous interposition; and this is an impression of moral probability. This consists of two parts. (1.) A distinct reference of the event to a power which we feel to be capable of producing it; namely, a direct interposition of the Deity. (2.) The perception of an adequate object, or a conviction of high moral probability that an interposition of Divine power might be exerted in such circumstances, or for the accomplishment of such an object. Such are the miracles of the sacred writings. As events opposed to the common course of nature, they are, by the supposition, physically improbable in the highest degree. Were they not so, were they in the lowest degree probable according to our conceptions of the course of nature, they could not be miracles, and consequently could not answer the purpose for which they are intended. But notwithstanding this species of improbability, they carry with them all the elements of absolute credibility; namely, the highest species of testimony, supported by a moral probability which bears directly upon every element of the statement.

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### *Moral Probability of Miracles.*

THIS may be briefly referred to the following heads:—

1. The human mind had wandered far from truth respecting God; and on the great question of his character and will, a future state, and the mode of acceptance in his sight, the light furnished by reason among the wisest of men was faint and feeble. On points of

such importance there was the highest moral probability that the Deity would not leave mankind in this state of darkness, but would communicate to them some distinct knowledge.

2. It is further probable, that if such a communication were made to man, it would be accompanied by prodigies or miraculous events, calculated to show beyond a doubt the immediate agency of God, and thus to establish the divine authority of the record.

3. There is no improbability that the power of the Deity should produce deviations from the usual course of nature capable of answering such a purpose. For what we call the course of nature is nothing more than an order of events which he has established; and there is no improbability that for an adequate end he might produce a deviation from this order.

4. An important branch of the moral probability of the whole statement of the sacred writings arises from the characters of the truths themselves, challenging the assent and approbation of every uncontaminated mind. This part of the subject resolves itself into three parts; namely, the truths relating to the character and perfections of the Deity; the high and refined morality of the gospel; and the adaptation of the whole provisions of Christianity to the actual condition of man as a moral being. The former carry a conviction of their truth to the mind of every candid inquirer; the two latter fix themselves upon the conscience or moral feelings of all classes of men with an impression which is irresistible.

This mode of reasoning is not chargeable with that kind of fallacy which has sometimes been ascribed to it,—that it professes first to prove the doctrine by the miracle, and then to try the miracle by the doctrine. The tendency of it is only to deduce from the various elements which really enter into the argument a kind of compound evidence, the strongest certainty which on such a subject the human mind is capable of receiving. It is composed of the character of the truths—

the moral probability of a revelation of clear knowledge on subjects of such infinite importance—and the highest species of testimony for the miraculous evidence by which the revelation was accompanied. There are principles in our nature calculated to perceive the manner in which the different parts of such an argument harmonize with each other; and, upon every principle of the human mind, it is impossible to conceive any thing more highly calculated to challenge the serious attention and absolute conviction of every sound understanding.

This imperfect view of a deeply interesting subject will be sufficient to show the fallacy of the objection which has been urged against the credibility of miracles,—that they are contrary to our unalterable experience of the established course of nature. There might have been some degree of plausibility in the argument if these events had been alleged to have taken place in ordinary circumstances; but the case is essentially altered, and this kind of improbability is altogether removed, when in the alleged deviation a new agent is introduced entirely capable of producing it. Such, as we have seen, are the miracles of the sacred writings; and the question in regard to their probability is, not whether they are probable according to the usual course of nature, but whether they are probable in the circumstances in which they are alleged to have taken place; namely, in the case of a direct interposition of the Deity for certain great and adequate purposes. In such a case, our estimate of probability must be founded, according to the principles already stated, not upon our experience of similar events, but on the knowledge which we derive from other sources of the power of the agent to whom the event is ascribed. Now the agent to whom miracles are ascribed is the Supreme Being, the creator of all things, the stupendous monuments of whose omnipotent power are before us, and within us, and around us. What we call the established course of nature is merely an order of



events which he has appointed; and the question of probability is, whether it is probable that for certain adequate purposes he should produce a deviation from this order. For such a statement, indeed, we require strong, numerous, credible, and concurring testimonies; but it comes to be simply a question of evidence; and there is no real improbability that in these circumstances such events should take place.

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*Miracles not a Violation of the established Order of Nature, but referable to an Agency altogether new and peculiar.*

IN this manner, then, there is entirely removed from the statement the improbability which is founded upon the uniformity of the ordinary course of nature; because it is not in the ordinary course of nature that the events are alleged to have taken place, but in circumstances altogether new and peculiar. The subsequent inquiry becomes, therefore, simply a question of evidence; this evidence is derived from testimony; and we are thus led to take a slight view of the grounds on which we estimate the credibility of testimony.

Testimony, we are told, is fallacious, and is liable to deceive us. But so are our senses;—they also may deceive, and perhaps have deceived us, as in the case of ocular spectra; but we do not, on that account, discredit the evidence of our eyes; we only take means, in certain cases, for correcting their indications by other senses, as by touching the object, or by a comparison with the visual impressions of other men; and, whatever probability there is that the eyes of one man may be deceived in any one instance, the probability is as nothing that both his sight and touch should be deceived at once; or that the senses of ten men should be deceived in the same manner at the same time. It is the same with regard to testimony. It may have deceived us in particular instances; but this applies to one species of testimony only; there is another species

which never deceived us. We learn by experience to separate distinctly the one from the other, and fix upon a species of testimony on which we rely with the same confidence as on the uniformity of the course of nature. Thus, if we find a man who in other respects shows every indication of a sound mind, relating an event which happened under his own inspection, and in such circumstances that he could not possibly be deceived; if his statement be such as contributes in no respect to his credit or advantage, but, on the contrary, exposes him to ridicule, contempt, and persecution; if, notwithstanding, he steadily perseveres in it, under every species of persecution, and even to the suffering of death; to suppose such a testimony intended to deceive would be to assume a deviation from the established course of human character, as remarkable as any event which it could possibly convey to us. This might be maintained in regard to one such testimony; but if we find numerous witnesses agreeing in the same testimony, all equally informed of the facts, all showing the same characters of credibility, and without the possibility of concert or connivance, the evidence becomes, not convincing only, but incontrovertible.

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*Grounds on which we estimate the Credibility of Testimony in regard to unusual or miraculous Events.*

THE grounds on which we receive with confidence the evidence of testimony, may, therefore, be briefly stated in the following manner:—

1. That the statement refers to a matter of fact,—that the fact was such as could be easily ascertained by the person who relates it,—and that he had sufficient opportunity of ascertaining it. When the statement includes a point of opinion, the case comes under another principle; and we require, in the first instance, to separate what is opinion from what is fact.
2. That we have no reason to suspect the witness.

to be influenced by interest or passion in his evidence ; or that he has any purpose to answer by it calculated to promote his own advantage.

3. That various individuals, without suspicion of connivance, have concurred in the same statement. This is a point of the utmost importance ; and in cases in which we are satisfied that there could be no connivance, a degree of evidence is derived from the concurrence of testimonies which may be often independent even of the credibility of the individual witnesses. For, though it were probable that each of them singly might lie, the chances that they should all happen to agree in the same lie may be found to amount to an impossibility. On this subject there is also a further principle of the greatest interest, which has been well illustrated by Laplace, namely, that the more improbable a statement is in which such witnesses agree, the greater is the probability of its truth. Thus we may have two men whom we know to be so addicted to lying, that we would not attach the smallest credit to their single testimony on any subject. If we find these concurring in a statement respecting an event which was highly probable, or very likely to have occurred at the time which they mention, we may still have a suspicion that they are lying, and that they may have happened to concur in the same lie, even though there should be no supposition of connivance. But if the statement was in the highest degree improbable, such as that of a man rising from the dead, we may feel it to be impossible that they could accidentally have agreed in such a statement ; and, if we are satisfied that there could be no connivance, we may receive a conviction from its very improbability that it must be true. In cases of concurring testimonies, we expect that the witnesses shall agree in all essential and important particulars ; and, on the other hand, evidence of the authenticity of testimony is sometimes derived from the various witnesses differing in trifling circumstances in such a manner as, without weakening

the main statement, tends to remove the suspicion of collusion or connivance.

4. In all matters of testimony, we are greatly influenced by our confidence in a certain uniformity of human character. We attach much importance, for example, to our previous knowledge of the narrator's character for veracity; and a man may have acquired such a character in this respect that we confide in his veracity in every instance in which his testimony is concerned, with a confidence equal to that with which we rely on the uniformity of the course of nature. In such a case, indeed, we proceed upon a uniformity which applies only to a particular order, namely, those whom we consider as men of veracity. But there is also a principle of uniformity which applies to the whole species; and in which we confide as regulating every man of sane mind. Thus, if the statement of a narrator contain circumstances calculated to promote his own advantage, we calculate on the probability of fabrication, and reject his evidence, except we had previously acquired absolute confidence in his veracity. But if, on the contrary, his statement operates against himself, conveying an imputation against his own character, or exposing him to contempt, ridicule, or personal injury; without any previous knowledge of his veracity, we are satisfied that nothing could make him adhere to such a testimony but an honest conviction of its truth.

5. A very important circumstance is the absence of any contradictory or conflicting testimony. This applies, in a striking manner, to the miraculous statements of the sacred writings; for, even on the part of those who were most interested in opposing them, there is no testimony which professes to show, that at the time when the miracles are said to have taken place they did not take place. It is, indeed, a remarkable circumstance, that the earliest writers against Christianity ascribe the miraculous events to the power of sorcery or magic, but never attempt to call them in question as matters of fact.

6. Much corroboration of testimony may often be obtained from our knowledge of facts of such a nature as, without directly bearing upon the statements to which the testimony refers, cannot be accounted for on any other supposition than the conviction of these statements being true. This principle applies, in a remarkable manner, to the miraculous histories of the sacred writings. We know, as an historical fact, the rapid manner in which the Christian faith was propagated in the early ages, against the most formidable opposition, and by means of the feeblest human instruments. We are told, that this was owing to the conviction produced by miraculous displays of Divine power; we feel that the known effect corresponds with the alleged cause; and that it cannot be accounted for on any other principle.

It does not belong to our present inquiry to allude more particularly to the direct evidence by which the miracles of the sacred writings are supported; we merely refer, in this general manner, to the principles on which the evidence is to be estimated. A very interesting branch of the subject will come under our view when we speak of memory and arbitrary association. We shall then see the irresistible importance of the commemorative rites of Christianity, by which the memory of these events has been transmitted from age to age, or rather from year to year; and by which our minds are carried backward, in one unbroken series, to the time when the events occurred, and to the individuals who witnessed them. In this manner, also, is entirely removed any feeling of uncertainty which may attach to testimony, as we recede from the period at which the events took place, and as the individuals are multiplied. Upon the whole, therefore, the evidence becomes so clear and conclusive, that we may say of those who reject it what the great Author of Christianity said on another occasion,—“If they hear not these, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.”

REMARKS  
ON THE  
COMMEMORATIVE RITES  
OF THE  
CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

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FROM DOCTOR ABERCROMBIE'S INQUIRIES CONCERNING THE INTEL-  
LECTUAL POWERS AND THE INVESTIGATION OF TRUTH.

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*Important Application of the Principle of Arbitrary  
Association, in Commemorative Rites.*

It is unnecessary to enlarge upon the subject of arbitrary association, as the observation of every one will furnish numerous examples of it. There is one application of the principle, however, which deserves to be referred to in a more particular manner. I allude to the practice of commemorative rites, or periodical observances, for transmitting the remembrance of remarkable events. These are in their nature, in general, entirely arbitrary; or, if they have any analogy to the events, the relation is only figurative. But the influence of such celebrations is of the most extensive and most important kind. If the events, particularly, are of a very uncommon character, these rites remove any feeling of uncertainty which attaches to traditional testimony, when it has been transmitted through a long period of time, and consequently through a great number of individuals. They carry us back, in one unbroken series, to the period of the events themselves, and to the individuals who were witnesses of them.

The most important application of the principle in the manner now referred to is in the observances of religion which are intended to commemorate those events which are connected with the revelation of the Christian faith. The importance of this mode of transmission has not been sufficiently attended to by those who have urged the insufficiency of human testimony to establish the truth of events which are at variance with the common course of nature. We have formerly alluded to one part of this sophism, and have stated the grounds on which we contend that no objection to the credibility of these events can be founded upon our observation of what we call the course of nature. We have admitted that a much higher species of evidence is required for them than would be required for events which correspond with our previous observation; and this high and peculiar evidence is confirmed in a striking manner by the periodical rites now referred to. By means of these we are freed entirely from every impression of the fallibility of testimony, and the possibility of the statements having been fabricated; as we are conducted in one uninterrupted series to the period when the events took place, and to the individuals who witnessed them. This will appear if we state in a few words a hypothetical case. Let us conceive a person attempting to impose upon the world by an account of some wonderful or miraculous event, which he alleges occurred five hundred years ago. He, of course, exerts every possible ingenuity in fabricating documents, and framing the appearance of a chain of testimony in support of his statement. It is quite possible that he might thus deceive a considerable number of credulous persons; and that others, who did not believe his statement, might yet find difficulty in proving its fallacy. But if the report were further to bear, that ever since the occurrence of the alleged event it had been regularly and specially celebrated by a certain periodical observance, it is clear that this would bring the statement to the test of a

fact open to examination, and that the fallacy of the whole would be instantly detected.

On these principles it must appear that the statements of the sacred writings, respecting miraculous events which are said to have occurred upwards of 1800 years ago, could not have been fabricated at any intermediate era during that period. It is unnecessary to state how much more improbable it is that they could have been fabricated at the very time and place in which they are said to have occurred, and in the midst of thousands who are said to have witnessed them, many of them were deeply interested in detecting their fallacy. This part of the question is not connected with our present inquiry, but it is impossible to dismiss the subject without one reflection:—that if we are to proceed upon the principle of probabilities, we must balance fairly the probabilities of fabrication. If we do so, we hesitate not to assert, that the probability of the world being imposed upon, under all the circumstances now alluded to, is more at variance with our firm and unalterable experience than all that we are called upon to believe.



# QUESTIONS

FOR EXAMINATION OF STUDENTS, IN THE EVIDENCES  
OF CHRISTIANITY.

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## CHAPTER I.

*Page 5.*

WHAT are the two ways of judging of the genuineness of a communication purporting to come from a person at a distance?

What would be the sources of uncertainty in the first examination?

*Page 6.*

Can we determine with greater precision concerning the credibility of the messengers?

Enumerate the evidences of veracity which may be observed in the messengers, and in their manner of delivering their message.

May these two modes of examination be applied to a message from God?

Under what head does the first argument come?

*Page 7.*

What is the substance of the message?

What is the point of inquiry?

What objection is made to an argument founded on the internal evidences of Christianity?

Does this apply to the second topic of examination? why not?

What questions may properly be asked concerning the messengers?

*Page 8.*

What do we rest upon the solution of these questions?

What advantages had they to whom the message of the gospel was originally addressed, for judging of its truth?

What questions are asked concerning our own means of satisfying ourselves of the truth of Christianity?

*Page 9.*

What is the surest way of transmitting the knowledge and belief of the people of one age to those of another?

Are the records of the Christian religion the only historical documents that have come down to us?

Are other historical documents generally believed without hesitation?

Give an example.

Does the inquiry into the truth of Christianity involve any but the ordinary principles of historical criticism?

How could those to whom Christianity was first presented judge of its truth?

*Page 10.*

How can we judge concerning the same question?

Are we to consider it in the same light as a common historical question?

What is apt to prevent us from examining the question in this light?

What sort of a question has it been made?

*Page 11.*

Is the object of the inquiry the *character*, or is it the *truth* of Christianity?

How should the mind therefore be prepared for the investigation?

Are not some minds prejudiced against Christianity? why?

What feeling is unfavourable to the impression of the Christian argument?

*Page 12.*

If the subject had not been sacred, how would the history of Jesus have been regarded?

If we could consider him as the founder of a school of philosophy, how much testimony would satisfy us?

Had it been a question of mere erudition, how would the existing testimony have been looked upon?

What is necessary, in order to form a fair estimate of the strength of the Christian argument?

What is the effect of a prejudice against the Christian religion? Of a prejudice in favour of it?

What difficulties does the pious man experience in examining the arguments of Christianity?

*Page 13.*

Is he suspicious of Christian writers, as well as of himself?

What is the effect of this suspicion?

What writers does it particularly affect?

What may be alleged in opposition to it?

Does the suspicion still remain, notwithstanding these considerations?

*Page 14.*

What is the effect of the sacredness of the subject?

By what comparison is this illustrated?

What sort of scrutiny has the Christian argument undergone?

*Page 15.*

What is the effect of this? why?

What is the effect of the severe controversy concerning the truth of Christianity?

Why are other books which are really less authentic received as of established authority?

What would be the result of a comparison of the evidences for the gospel of Matthew and those for any profane historian?

What feeling do we experience on finding a testimony in favour of Christianity in a profane historian?

*Page 16.*

What does Tacitus assert?

In what other book are the same facts attested?

In what circumstances has the testimony of Luke a decided advantage?

Is the genuineness of his publication better established than that of Tacitus?

By what other writers are the facts attested by Tacitus asserted?

Had they better means of information than Tacitus?

Why then is the testimony of Tacitus more highly prized than theirs?

*Page 17.*

Is it a sufficient explanation to say that Tacitus was a disinterested historian?

Are the moral qualifications of the witnesses for Christianity better than those of the witnesses for profane history?

Has the exception that they are interested witnesses been satisfactorily removed?

Is there still a disposition to prefer the secular historian?

*Page 18.*

If Tacitus had asserted that Christ rose from the dead, would it have silenced all cavils?

Would it have been highly prized by Christians?

What stronger testimony have we?

Whence then arises the preference of Tacitus?

Does the same principle affect the other parts of the Christian argument?

*Page 19.*

What proof is there that the books of the New Testament were really written by their professed authors?

When did Celsus write?

Who was he?

What does he assert?

Is his testimony preferred to that of Christian writers on the same principle with that of Tacitus?

Are the effects of this principle discernible in the writings of the defenders of Christianity?

Where does Lardner begin his evidence of the credibility of the gospel history?

Where does Doctor Chalmers think he should have begun?

*Page 20.*

What reference is made in the second epistle of Peter?

Is this esteemed a less valuable testimony to the authenticity of Paul's writings than if it had been found in one of the Fathers?

Is such a preference just?

Is it a further illustration of the principle already laid down with respect to the profane writers?

On what ground do the fathers of the church stand with reference to the writers of the New Testament?

Is it right to prefer distant and later testimony to that which is nearer the original source of information?

What do we neglect?

Where do we rest the whole of the argument?

To what is this owing?

How have the supporters of Christianity done injustice to their own arguments?

*Page 21.*

Where do some of them begin?

To what do they come last?

What is the effect of this?

What is the effect of a fair comparison of Tacitus, and the New Testament?

Have the defenders of Christianity placed its truth on the right footing?

What should they tell their adversaries?

*Page 22.*

What would be the mode of examining into the circumstances of a transaction in a court of justice?

What would render the proof complete?

How would the testimony of distant witnesses be regarded?

Suppose a distant and long subsequent court to examine into the same transaction, what testimony would it prefer?

Where is this just principle reversed? how?

*Page 23.*

What should be the great object of an inquirer into the truth of Christianity?

Is it generally supposed that one is apt to overrate the argument for Christianity ?

Is this the fact ?

What does the present writer desire ?

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## CHAPTER II.

Into how many parts is the argument for the truth of the gospel history divided ?

What is proposed in the first ?

*Page 24.*

The second ?

The third ?

The fourth ?

Do we require more evidence for sacred than profane history ?

What is the effect of obtaining the superior degree of evidence ?

*Page 25.*

State again the first division of the subject.

Suppose that but one composition had survived the darkness of the middle ages, from what general consideration might we suppose it to be true ?

What evidence of its truth might be drawn from the appearance of the document itself ?

*Page 26.*

What from the number of copies extant ?

Might it gain credit in the world on these grounds ?

What would be the effect of the discovery of another manuscript testifying to the same facts ?

What is the effect if their testimony appears to be independent ?

What if one is derived from the other ?

*Page 27.*

What would be the effect of a third manuscript and a third testimony ?

Among the many testimonies which have come down to us, which are probably more numerous, the true or the false? why?

Enumerate some of the circumstances which confirm the truth of history?

*Page 28.*

Will skepticism resist all this?

What is the last supposition of the skeptic?

What are some of the evidences of falsehood found in particular histories?

Are manuscripts sometimes convicted of forgery?

*Page 29.*

Does this impair the confidence which it is in the power of historical evidence to bestow?

How do we usually learn the age or author of a written document?

Does the New Testament rest on the credit of one historian?

What parts of it were written by the immediate disciples of our Lord?

To what does Celsus refer?

*Page 30.*

What fact does his testimony prove?

What was his reason for believing that the gospel was written by Christ's disciples?

Would this be readily admitted if it were the life of a philosopher? why?

*Page 31.*

Do subsequent authors testify the same fact?

What is remarked of the series of subsequent testimonies?

What sort of testimonies to the genuineness of the gospels are antecedent to that of Celsus?

Why are they more valuable and decisive than his testimony?

What is the first kind of those testimonies?

The second?

The third ?

Are the last kind express citations ?

*Page 32.*

Are any of the fathers mentioned in the New Testament ?

Who was St. Clement ?

Where is he mentioned ?

Where does he refer to Paul's writings ?

What epistle does he quote ?

What does this prove ?

What other references does Clement make ?

From whom have we similar testimonies ?

To what does Ignatius refer ? Polycarp ?

*Page 33.*

Do similar testimonies multiply in later times ?

When did Tertullian flourish ?

What does Lardner observe concerning him ?

In estimating the value of any testimony, what are the two objects of consideration ?

What opportunities had the witnesses to the genuineness of the New Testament writings for knowing the truth of what they asserted ?

*Page 34.*

What character do they exhibit in their writings ?

What decisive evidence of honesty and sincerity did they give ?

Why may we believe those who received their testimony to have judged correctly of its truth ?

What writers refer to the books of the New Testament ?

Why can we not suppose them to have been obscure writings ?

Could those who referred to them have deceived the people as to their genuineness ?

What opposers of Christianity were on the spot to detect frauds, if attempted ?

*Page 35.*

Was Christianity a subject of keen controversy from the time of its first appearance ?



What assertion would the Christian writers never have dared to make?

What was the only circumstance which the cause then had to recommend it?

What sort of circumstances would the falsehood of the Christian testimony concerning the genuineness of the sacred books imply?

What is the first of these circumstances?

The second?

The third?

*Page 36.*

The fourth?

What very singular circumstance, concerning all the writers, is mentioned?

How may we estimate the effect of all these circumstances upon the argument?

What sort of argument is thus furnished?

Why is the testimony of the Christian writers better than that of Celsus?

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### CHAPTER III.

*Page 37.*

What is the second part of the argument?

What is it right to insist upon under this head?

Under what dominion was Judea in the time of our Saviour?

What writers notice it?

What information do they give us?

With whom may the historians of the New Testament be brought into comparison?

To what does the history of Christ and his apostles contain references?

*Page 38.*

How were they brought into notice?

Is this circumstance sufficient to prove that their history could not have been the work of an inventor at some subsequent period?

What changes took place in the government of Judea during the period of the gospel history?

What other countries underwent similar changes?

Do these changes render the *invention* of the gospel history still more improbable?

*Page 39.*

Does the history of Josephus relate in part to this period?

How was he disposed towards Christianity?

What is the result of a close comparison of the Christian, Jewish, and profane authors of this period?

*Page 40.*

To what work is the reader referred?

What confirms the genuine antiquity of the gospel historians?

What does their accuracy clearly prove?

How does the destruction of Jerusalem confirm their genuine antiquity?

Do subsequent writers betray an ignorance of the particular customs with which the gospel writers were so familiar?

What strong circumstance in favour of the antiquity of the New Testament is again insisted on?

*Page 41.*

From what does the argument derive additional strength?

What is the number of the writers of the New Testament?

Does their uniform accuracy prove them to have been eye-witnesses, or contemporaries of the events they relate?

How may a copyist be distinguished from an original historian?

When there are two actual witnesses relating truly the same events, in what do they agree?

In what do they differ?

Do both these circumstances increase their credibility?

*Page 42.*

Where does this coincidence exist?

Is there any appearance of studied coincidence between Josephus and the New Testament writers?

Is there any opposition ?

May their apparent contradictions be reconciled ?

What is the effect of a contradiction between two historians ?

What is the effect of too close a resemblance ?

How is it in the case before us ?

Would a closer resemblance to the existing authorities have rendered the gospel narrative less credible ?

*Page 43.*

What apparent contradiction is mentioned between the gospels and Josephus ?

How is it reconciled ?

What apparent contradiction appears with respect to the name of the high priest ?

How is this explained ?

Why is it not fair to judge of the evangelists by their agreement with Josephus ?

How do other Jewish writers corroborate the gospel history ?

*Page 44.*

Was any foreign testimony necessary for the vindication of the evangelists ?

What is the use of such testimony ?

What is the effect of an apparent difficulty when it has been explained ?

What strikes us in this branch of the argument ?

Is it expected generally that contemporary historians will always allude to the same circumstances ?

Is the testimony of one historian to an event or custom impaired by the silence of others ?

What principle is allowed in such cases ?

Does an apparent contradiction between two historians impair the credit of either ?

What is such contradiction called ?

To what is it referred ?

*Page 45.*

Have these principles been admitted with respect to the gospel writers ?

How is this proved ?

What has been the effect of this rough handling of the gospel writers ?

What always affords a presumption of the truth of a story ? why ?

What does circumstantial detail impart to a narrative ?

*Page 46.*

Is it difficult to invent consistent circumstantial details ?

Is the gospel narrative a very circumstantial one ?

Give an example of this.

Is the argument strengthened by a consideration of the time when the gospel history appeared ?

What proof is thus furnished ?

How can we verify the circumstances of the gospel history ?

What furnishes a strong weight of circumstantial evidence in favour of the gospel history ?

*Page 47.*

What is taken as a specimen of this argument ?

What circumstance of the gospel history is verified by profane historians with respect to the governor ?

The sentence ?

The derision of our Saviour ?

The scourging ?

The written accusation ?

*Page 48.*

The three languages ?

Bearing the cross ?

The burial ?

Is this circumstantial agreement with profane history a strong evidence in favour of the truth of the gospel history ? why ?

Is there any appearance of design in this circumstantial agreement ?

Is each of the gospel writers uniformly consistent with himself ?

*Page 49.*

What is a frequent mark of falsehood in forged narratives ?

Is this found in any single piece of the New Testament ?  
 What other mark of falsehood are they exempted from ?  
 Give an example of their want of pretension or parade.  
 In what manner is the narrative written ?

*Page 50*

Is there any appearance of diffidence or affectation ?  
 Of anxiety about being believed ?  
 What very strong circumstance is mentioned ?  
 Why is it so considered ?  
 Illustrate this by the example of a person telling a wonderful story.

*Page 51.*

In what manner do the evangelists write ?  
 For what purpose according to Luke ?  
 Why do they not appear to anticipate the surprise of their readers ?  
 Did the miracles of Christ at first excite surprise ?  
 Why should not the subsequent narrative of them ?  
 What is the most striking internal proof of the truth of the gospel ?  
 Why is it so considered ?

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CHAPTER IV.

*Page 52.*

What is the third branch of the author's argument ?  
 To what were the Christian writers exposed ?  
 What proofs are there of this ?

*Page 53.*

What were the usual principles of the Roman policy with respect to the religions of other nations ?  
 Did this demand any exertion of moderation or principle ?  
 why not ?

*Page 54.*

What principle distinguished the Jewish religion ?  
Why did the Romans tolerate the Jews ?  
What principle distinguished the Christian religion ?  
What rendered it formidable to the Romans ?

*Page 55.*

How long was it tolerated ?  
How was it at first regarded ?  
Did it excite alarm at first ?  
What ensued in a few years ?  
Who were the first Christian martyrs ?  
Were the Jews hostile to Christianity ?  
How was their hostility manifested ?  
Give examples.

*Page 56.*

What punishment could the Jews inflict ?  
What other danger threatened the Christians ?  
Was the profession of Christianity honourable at that period ?  
How were the Christians characterized by Tacitus ? By Epictetus ?  
How did the situation of a martyr for Christianity differ from that of a martyr for patriotism or philosophy ?  
What alternative does the author propose ?  
Which part of the alternative must we adopt ? why ?

*Page 57.*

What is the highest proof of sincerity ?  
Give examples.  
How far does the proof in these cases go ?  
Does martyrdom prove the truth of the martyr's doctrine ? why not ?  
What does it prove ?  
What distinguishes the martyrdom of the first Christians from all other examples ?  
How is this assertion proved ?

*Page 58,*

Illustrate this by a comparison of Socrates and others with one of the first Christian martyrs.

What supposition is made?

How is it destroyed?

How is the argument strengthened by the number of the Christian witnesses?

*Page 59.*

What have certain infidels asserted?

What two parties unite in the testimony to the truth of Christianity?

Could the glory of founding a new faith influence the taught, even if it could the teachers?

Illustrate this by examples from the life of Paul.

What strength does the argument derive from these examples?

*Page 60.*

What were the early hearers of Christianity competent to disprove?

To what are frequent allusions made in the epistles?

Why is this inconsistent with the supposition that Christianity is all a fabrication?

What proof do apostates from Christianity furnish to its truth?

Who would have availed themselves of any confessions of artifice and insincerity which the apostates might have made?

Does it appear that any of them made disclosures of this nature?

What did some of them do?

What does this conduct prove?

## CHAPTER V.

*Page 61.*

What is the last division of the argument?

What is established by proving the authenticity of Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians? why?

What by proving the authenticity of the New Testament at large?

What is the strength of the testimony of the teachers of the taught?

*Page 62.*

Why, on a point of ordinary history, is the testimony of Tacitus held decisive?

What advantage has the history of the New Testament over ordinary history?

How is the narrative of a profane historian satisfactorily confirmed?

How may this evidence be overturned?

*Page 63.*

Do presumptions of this sort impair our belief in profane history?

Can such presumptions be admitted concerning the history of the New Testament? why not?

What unwritten testimony is insisted on?

What writer comes next after the first promulgators of the gospel?

With whom was he contemporary, and when did he write?

Who follows next?

Who was Clement?

What did he write?

What is observed of the written testimonies?

*Page 64.*

What testimony is now insisted on?

When were the churches of Rome and Corinth planted?

What is said of the epistles addressed to them?

What is said of the facts of the gospel histories?

What could have confirmed or disproved them?

What results from all this?



How does this differ from common history ?  
 To have a full view of the argument, what must we reflect with respect to the societies ?  
 The principle of their formation ?  
 The miracles ?  
 The inducement to embrace the religion ?  
 The temptations to abandon it ?  
 The apostates from it ?

*Page 65.*

What is said of the written testimonies ?  
 How are the intervals of time between these testimonies filled up ?  
 What does every convert of those days give ?  
 How is the Gentile's evidence confirmed ?  
 The Jews ?  
 What circumstance should never be forgotten ?  
 What do the evidences rest upon ?

*Page 66.*

What render these facts accessible to inquirers ?  
 Was this examination made ?  
 What proves the testimony of the Jewish converts to have been an honest and a competent testimony ?  
 Were many of the Jews converted ?  
 What does their conversion confirm ?  
 What objection is noticed ?  
 What delusion is the cause of this objection ?  
 What does the objector forget ?  
 How does he regard the testimony of the Jewish converts ?

*Page 67.*

Of what circumstance is he unmindful ?  
 To what would a thousand more of these converts be equivalent ?  
 Would their testimony satisfy the objector ? why not ?  
 How is the obstinacy of the Jews who were not converted looked upon ?  
 What does every Jewish convert give ? why ?  
 What inquiry does the infidel next make ?

*Page 68.*

What have Christian writers attempted to prove ? how ?

What have we in the Gospel history ?

What do we there see ?

How would the doctrine of Christ and his apostles affect such people as the Jews ?

The priesthood ?

The great body of the people ?

*Page 69.*

What lay at the bottom of their opposition ?

Where do we see examples of their violence ?

How is this confirmed ?

Give an example.

To what is the strength of conviction proportioned ?

Is attention a voluntary act ?

From what does the mind naturally turn away its attention ?

*Page 70.*

What ensures the success of an argument in a great degree ?

Do passion and interest often lead to conviction ?

Is this any argument against the unity and immutability of truth ?

Where does the difference lie ?

What kind of truth is naturally resisted ?

Do these considerations fully explain the unbelief of the great mass of the Jewish nation ?

*Page 71.*

What difficulty is mentioned ?

Of what is there no example ?

To what did the first teachers of Christianity appeal ?

From what is an argument for Christianity derived ?

From what an argument against it ?

What principle is proposed ?

*Page 72.*

Is the unbelief of most of the Jews decisive ? why not ?

Is the belief of a few of them decisive ? why ?

With what is the truth of the miracles consistent ?

With what is their falsehood inconsistent ?

What is all that we can say of the conduct of the Jewish party ?

*Page 73.*

What are we sure of ?

What is said of the argument for Christianity from the conduct of the first proselytes ?

What of the objection against it from the conduct of the unbelieving Jews ?

What is said of the conduct of the Jews ?

What interesting fact is noticed ?

*Page 74.*

What would have been the effect of the conversion of all the Jewish nation ?

What case would it have resembled ?

What objections would it have furnished to the authenticity of the Gospel ?

Is the argument in its present state free from these objections ?

What have we in the first instance ?

In the second ?

How may the silence of the enemies of Christianity, concerning its miracles, be interpreted ?

To what other people may the same reasoning be applied ? how ?

*Page 75.*

What circumstance is considered fortunate ? why ?

What would have been the effect if the Roman empire had at once become Christian ?

What is the effect of the collision of opposite parties ?

What has been insisted on by the enemies of Christianity.

What is certain concerning its facts ?

Have we better evidence of the miracles than that of Tacitus would be ?

What is it ?

*Page 76.*

How is it supported?

What has Tacitus attested?

Is his testimony credited?

What supposition is made?

How would such a statement by such a historian appear?

If he did not believe it, would he assert it?

If he did believe it, what follows?

*Page 77.*

If he did believe it, would he probably insert it in his history?

Does his omission of it, then, furnish any argument that the resurrection is a falsehood?

What would have been the consequence of Tacitus's inserting this fact in his history?

What is the next supposition?

Would Tacitus's becoming a Christian have made his supposed assertion of the resurrection really more credible?

*Page 78.*

Still, would it not have weakened the impression of his testimony? why?

Can a direct testimony to the miracles be expected from a heathen?

What can we offer instead of it?

Is this better testimony? why?

Is it less impressive?

Should it not be more so? why?

*Page 79.*

What kind of heathen testimony have we which is important?

Mention some of them.

What is said of the silence of Jewish and heathen writers?

Why is it on the Christian side of the argument?

What is said of their silence in not asserting the miracles?

Of their silence in not denying them?

What striking circumstance is noticed?

*Page 80.*

- How is it explained ?
- What does Josephus's history furnish ?
- In what does he coincide with the gospel writers ?
- Where are we to look for direct testimony to the miracles ?
- why ?

*Page 81.*

- If we had Tacitus's direct testimony to the miracles, what support would it still want ?
- What testimony actually has this support ?
- What does the author propose to examine ?
- What have we from the fathers ?
- By whom are their testimonies supported ?
- What do they prove ?
- Do they prove the faith of each of the writers as well as his respect for the New Testament ?

*Page 82.*

- Where are these testimonies exhibited ?
- What is said of them ?
- What is said of Barnabas ?
- Of his testimony ?
- What further testimony of his should we like to have ?
- How many of the books of the New Testament are historical ?
- Which are they ?

*Page 83.*

- What is the character and design of the rest ?
- Have we any other narrative of the miracles of Christianity ?
- What supposition is made ?

*Page 84.*

- What would have been the fate of this performance ?
- What advantage would have been gained by it ?
- Is this an important advantage ?
- How is the former supposition varied ?
- Would this other supposed history be of much use in the argument ? why not ?

What is said of the New Testament ?

What delusion is complained of ?

*Page 85.*

What is the difference between a narrative and a work of speculation on morality ?

What do the evangelists give us ?

What is a gospel ?

Do we require many of them ? why not ?

Were many narratives of the events of our Saviour's history written ?

How is this proved ?

What was their fate ?

Why were they lost ?

*Page 86.*

What species of composition are more numerous ?

What is their design ?

What may we gather from them ?

Which is the first of these ?

What does it consist of ?

What passage is quoted from it ?

What is the next piece ?

In whose name is it written ?

*Page 87.*

What is its object ?

Could a formal narrative be expected in it ? why not ?

What might be expected ?

What passage is quoted ?

What remarks are made on it ?

What does the narrative of the evangelists give us ?

What does the allusions of the fathers give us ?

*Page 88.*

What other passage is quoted ?

Why did not the fathers give a formal testimony to the truth of the gospel narrative ?

What has every Christian writer of the primitive age done ?

Was the resurrection of Christ then urged as a proof of his being a teacher? why not?

For what purpose was it urged?

How often does Polycarp mention it?

Who was he?

What other writer does the same?

What general fact is announced?

*Page 89.*

How many apostolic fathers are there?

How many writers have we between Polycarp and Irenæus?

Are all these in the lifetime of two men?

How is this proved?

What circumstance does Irenæus mention?

*Page 90.*

What is said of the epistles?

Do they furnish stronger arguments than the writings of the fathers? why?

Who were the best judges of their value?

What is their decision?

Do we usually assign them their true value and importance in the argument?

What do the epistles assume as undoubted and indisputable?

*Page 91.*

What evidence of sincerity do they contain?

What is said of St. Paul.

What do we collect from the general strain of his epistles?

How were the Christians, to whom St. Paul wrote, qualified to be arbiters in this question?

To what does St. Paul appeal?

In what epistles?

Does he appeal to the miracles boldly?

*Page 92.*

On what does he rest the main argument for the resurrection?

Give the passage.

What does this passage prove?

To what can we appeal for the truth of the Gospel history?

Where does the great strength of the evidence lie?

## CHAPTER VI.

### *Page 93.*

What is the next species of evidence for the truth of Christianity?

In what manner may one isolated prophecy be disposed of?

Can those which relate to Christ's coming be thus disposed of? why not?

What objection is made to the language of prophecy?

What does the objector forget?

How would plainer language destroy the argument?

Illustrate this from the case of the Old Testament prophecies?

### *Page 94.*

Has the objection here described ever been made by infidels?

How is it answered?

What has lord Bolingbroke asserted?

What is said of his objection?

What is the best form in which a prophecy can be delivered?

### *Page 95.*

Where have we examples of it?

Why will not infidels attend to this part of the argument?

With what assertion does the author leave the infidel?

### *Page 96.*

In what manner are the prophecies of the Old Testament expressed?

Does this obscurity strengthen the argument? how?

Does it appear by the New Testament history, that the Jews were willing to perceive a conformity between the



prophecies concerning the Messiah and the events pertaining to the coming of Jesus ?

Were not his own disciples prejudiced in favour of a temporal prince and Messiah ?

How were their prejudices dissipated ?

What was then their main argument for Christianity ?

How were the great events of the new dispensation brought about ?

How does this strengthen the argument ?

*Page 97.*

Whose testimony is necessary in order to determine the antiquity of the prophecies ?

What circumstance would have invalidated this very testimony ? why ?

What preposterous supposition is necessary in order to evade the argument as it now stands ?

What satisfying pledge have we for the integrity and antiquity of the sacred writings ?

*Page 98.*

Are the prophecies exceedingly obscure ?

What particular prophecies are very plain ?

Are these prophecies and their fulfilment both remote ?

What important purpose have they answered ?

What proofs have we of the clearness of the old prophecies concerning the Messiah ?

What other example have we of the fulfilment of a clear prophecy ?

*Page 99.*

What was the use of this and other predictions of our Saviour ?

What examples have we of the recent fulfilment of clear prophecies ?

Do these fulfilments exhaust the whole argument from prophecy ?

What is said of the history of the Jews ?

What strange phenomenon does it exhibit ?

Where is this accounted for ?

*Page 100.*

What appears by the testimony of Josephus and Tacitus?

What has been the condition of the Jews since the destruction of the temple, and the dispersion of the nation?

What have they retained for 2000 years?

What appears in the past history of the Jews?

*Page 101.*

Do they appear to have always been a singular people?

What concession does the writer claim concerning them?

What injustice does the writer complain of?

Does the invalidation of one distinct and independent argument offered for Christianity affect the strength of the other arguments?

*Page 102.*

Where lies the main strength of the Christian argument?

Is it expected that the evidence of prophecy will still gain new strength?

What particular event is alluded to?

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## CHAPTER VII.

What have the geologists said concerning the antiquity of the world?

Does this affect the historical evidence of the New Testament?

*Page 103.*

What is the only fair way of overthrowing the credibility of this history?

How are sciences usually tried?

What is claimed for theology?

What examples are given?

*Page 104.*

If the credibility of Jesus Christ could be impeached, what dilemma would this place us in?

What state of mind would be the consequence ?

To what is this case compared ?

How would an experimental philosopher proceed in such a case ?

*Page 105.*

Would a philosopher of the highest order endeavour to reconcile the contradiction ?

*Page 106.*

Does Dr. Chalmers believe such a difficulty really to exist ?

What assumption have some infidels taken up ?

How do they proceed upon it ?

Is this fair ? why not ?

*Page 107.*

How can we dispose of that part of the dilemma which consists in the alleged falsehood of our Saviour's testimony ?

Do the geologists contradict themselves ?

Does Christ assert the Mosaical antiquity of the world ?

Does Moses deny the existence of matter previous to the creation of this world ?

*Page 108.*

What suppositions are made ?

Is any of them more rational than the rejection of Christianity in the face of its historical evidence ?

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## CHAPTER VIII.

What is meant by the internal evidence of Christianity ?

What more may the term be made to include ?

What may we collect from the performance itself ?

*Page 109.*

Has this been done ?

With what success ?

In what questions has this species of argument been applied ?

What has been decided on its sole authority ?

Whence have we evidence of the antiquity of the New Testament ?

Of the simplicity and sincerity of its authors ?

What else gives a powerful impression of the truth of the narrative ?

What certainty is there in this internal evidence ?

How is it applied in every-day affairs ?

Is it as applicable to written as to spoken testimony ?

*Page 110.*

What is the other species of internal evidence ?

Is it as decisive as the former species ? why not ?

With what is the former compared ?

With what is the latter compared ?

In what does Dr. Chalmers differ from former defenders of Christianity ?

Upon what is one half of Leland's discussion expended ?

How could a vast deal of controversy be saved ?

How should the New Testament be received ?

*Page 111.*

What has advanced the science of external nature ?

How long has natural science been a favourite study ?

How long is it since the true method of pursuing it has been pointed out ?

What sort of evidence has been relied on since this time ?

On what are philosophers now agreed ?

Describe the procedure of the inductive philosophy.

How is its hardihood characterized and illustrated ?

*Page 112.*

Is it easy to submit to the rules of the inductive philosophy ?

What sacrifices must be made ?

What is the glory of Lord Bacon's philosophy ?

What is necessary to justify the procedure of the inductive philosophy ?

*Page 113.*

Should it be applied to the phenomena of mind, as well as of matter ?

What errors formerly existed in this department of science ?

In this department what must be our procedure ?

What is a law of the human mind ?

What is the business of the moral philosopher ?

What principles must be applied to moral and metaphysical subjects ?

Where have opposite principles prevailed ?

Whose writings have done much to remove the evil ?

*Page 114.*

In what spirit should the evidences of Christianity be discussed ?

What should be abandoned ?

What should be paramount to inclination and fancy ?

What should be maintained ?

What is said of many of the philosophers of the present day ?

Against what is this conduct an offence ?

*Page 115.*

What principles should be applied to the investigation before us ?

What sort of a hearing should it have ?

According to Bacon, what is the foundation of all human knowledge ?

Is this true of the knowledge received from the testimony of others ?

From what does man take his lesson ?

Can he control the processes of nature ?

By what process must he construct his system of science ?

How does he arrive at truth ?

Where is he ignorant ?

*Page 116.*

Where is this found to hold true ?

What was the consequence of the former neglect of this true mode of philosophising ?

What did philosophers then do instead of making use of their senses ?

What happened when they were at last set on the right path of discovery ?

What does this prove ?

What are the two leading features of the philosophical temper ?

What is the origin and disposition of the philosopher's humility ?

What does his hardihood consist in ?

What do we see in the speculations of Des Cartes ?

*Page 117.*

In the Newtonian system ?

Describe the procedure of Newton.

For what are philosophical humility and hardihood the best preparation ?

How is the philosopher's humility to be exercised in appreciating the pretensions of Christianity ?

How his hardihood ?

On entering into any department of inquiry, what is the best preparation ?

*Page 118.*

On investigating what subject, above all others, should caution and modesty be exercised ?

What is the most glaring rebellion against lord Bacon's principles ?

*Page 119.*

Is such a proceeding reprobated on moral or on philosophical principles ?

What is required by the spirit of modern or experimental philosophy ?

How much time may be required for a process of geology ?

Can one man's experience furnish information on such a subject ?

What is said of the administration of the Supreme Being ?

*Page 120.*

Can our own experience inform us of its character ?

Where are we to seek evidence on this subject ?

In what other respect is our experience limited ?

How is its extremely limited extent illustrated by the author ?

*Page 121.*

What is the question under consideration ?

If man's experience led him to certain conclusions concerning the divine administration, what will the Baconian philosophy require him to do ?

If it should appear that experience gives him no light on the subject, what must he do ?

As a consequence of these principles, to what authority do we submit in examining the claims of Christianity ?

What suggestion must we reject as the follies of a rash and unphilosophical speculation ?

Where does the great strength of the Christian argument lie ?

Is this safe ground and philosophical ?

Is the light of experience applicable and sufficient here ?

May we use it on lord Bacon's principles ?

How do we determine the weight of the testimony ?

*Page 122.*

Why do we believe the testimony of the apostles ?

Are we safe and at home in this kind of argument ? why ?

Is it consistent with the principles of experimental philosophy ? why ?

Do infidels reason as philosophically ? why not ?

What ground do they avoid ?

On what do they avoid pronouncing ?

On what do they presume to pronounce ?

Why do they reject Christianity ?

*Page 123.*

How does Rousseau proceed ?

What in the character of Christianity offended him ?

What was it necessary for him to sacrifice in order to embrace Christianity ?

Why could he not make this sacrifice ?

On what do we, who believe Christianity, pass a favourable sentence ?

Of what does the deist judge ?

What is the question at issue ?

*Page 124.*

What is the character of the first, i. e. the Christian argument ?

Of the second, the deistical argument ?

Why is the last entirely assumption ?

Why may we not judge of the conduct of the Almighty in given circumstances ?

What is it not right for man to assume ?

Is such an assumption unphilosophical ?

How are the arguments of the Christian and the infidel compared ?

To what has lord Bacon's philosophy been recently applied ?

What do we contend for ?

What is counted hard ?

*Page 125.*

What is science ?

What do we not question ?

How can the credibility of the phenomena be destroyed ?

Can a student verify every result ?

On what must he depend ?

In what science is this particularly the case ?

Whence do we gather facts in this science ?

To what is our attention principally directed ?

What should be observed in theology ?

*Page 126.*

What information should we desire in this science ?

To what evidence should we submit our preconceptions ?

Upon what should we pronounce ?

After the authority of the record is established, how should we behave ?

*Page 127.*

What would support us in such a trial ?

To what has inattention to these principles led the deists ?

What has been the effect of this course ?

Give an example.

Why should not the Christian reply with arguments drawn from natural religion ?

How must the objection drawn from natural religion be disposed of ?

Who will not be satisfied with this ?

*Page 128.*

How must they be satisfied ?

What writer has accomplished this, and in what work ?—

*See Note.*

What does another class of Christians require ?

How are they satisfied ?

To which class does Dr. Chalmers belong ?

What does he hold by ?

*Page 129.*

What does he think ?

Why does he disown the presumption of pronouncing on the character of Christianity ?



To what book is the other class of Christians referred?

What is bishop Butler's object in this work?

Why is his work well fitted to satisfy the class of Christians before referred to?

What difficulty does Chalmers not attempt to solve? why not?

*Page 130.*

What does he consider sufficient?

What remains for us to do?

What does the argument of bishop Butler enable us to say?

Is this positive evidence?

Is it satisfactory and clear so far as it goes?

Enumerate some of the difficulties existing in nature, as well as in Christianity.

What conclusion is drawn from these and similar examples?

## CHAPTER IX.

*Page 131.*

What is the origin of atheism?

Is the atheist better prepared to receive the proofs of Christianity? why?

With whom is the deist compared?

What forms the obstacle to his admission of the Christian miracles?

*Page 132.*

In what unphilosophical position does it place the deist?

What is said of Rousseau's deistical speculation?

What prevented his belief of Christianity?

Does the atheist regard the existence of God as *not proven* or *as disproven*?

*Page 133.*

What example of an assertion *not proven* is brought forward?

Does the atheist regard the assertion, that God exists in the same way as the above cited assertion, in regard by an unbiassed mind?

What do we offer to the mind of the atheist in this neutral state?

What do we ask of him?

Can he make Rousseau's objection? why not?

What difficulties does he escape ?

*Page 134.*

On what ground only can he question the truth of the miracles ? why ?

What do we therefore do to convince him ?

What appeals are made to prove the existence of God ?

What evidence do we present of a power superior to nature ?

*Page 135.*

What credentials did the agent of these miracles give ?

Can an atheist understand these credentials ?

Where are these claims to belief united ?

What are coupled with them ?

Of what does the whole furnish an irresistible evidence ?

If the atheist resist the evidence of the common phenomena of nature, what new phenomenon is here offered to him ?

What account does this new witness give of himself ?

Is this evidence of God's existence independent on the arguments commonly offered to prove it ?

*Page 136.*

May it be admitted though the others should be ?

What information does Jesus give of the attributes of God ?

How does the author invite the atheist to approach the discussion of the evidences of Christianity ?

## CHAPTER X.

If the New Testament be a message from God, what is our duty ?

What does Dr. Chalmers suppose to be beyond the cognizance of the human faculties ?

Has this prevented men from speculating on the subject ?

*Page 137.*

Is it deists alone who speculate boldly on religion ?

What have some Christians done ?

What lies at the bottom of the prevalent looseness in speculation and practice ?

What are some of its maxims ?

*Page 138.*

What principle is complained of by the author ?

How does a man sometimes conceive that all culpability is taken away ?

What circumstance ought to put an end to all this looseness and variety ?

What question should now succeed the fashionable one,  
 “ *What thinkest thou ?* ”

Is there a way of escaping this ?

Does any Christian formally disown the authority of the Bible ?

*Page 139.*

In what act are unwarrantable principles introduced ?

What is the business of a Scripture critic ?

How is he sometimes misled ?

What is complained of ?

*Page 140.*

Why are critics better agreed concerning the sense of profane, than of the sacred writers ?

What would produce unanimity among Scripture critics ?

Where lies the distinction between the two cases ?

Does the mysteriousness of the subject cause the disagreement in theology ?

What would make the language of the Testament plain to us ?

*Page 141.*

What would be the effect of reducing the interpretation of revelations to a mere question of language ?

Is this suffered ?

What should alone be consulted, to know the mind of the Spirit ?

What contrary course is taken ?

What then is the cause of the want of unanimity among Christians ?

What is our duty ?

Does this principle apply to common people ?

*Page 142.*

Is the common English translation of the Bible a good one ?

Having this good translation of the Bible, what should we do ?

What sort of mind should we bring to this task ?

What disposition ?

What sort of obedience ?

What does the Bible require ?

*Page 143.*

What assertion does Dr. Chalmers make concerning a number of professing Christians ?

What is one of the principles appealed to by them ?

Did the earliest Christians appeal to this principle ?

How was Christianity then recommended ?

How would men in the circumstances of the first disciples receive the truths of revelation ?

How do our circumstances differ from theirs ?

What is the consequence ?

*Page 144.*

What enables the mind now to take a loftier flight than it could in the primitive age of Christianity ?

How have the beauties and truths of the New Testament been applied ?

Describe the effects of this.

What was superseded ?

What was pleaded in vain ?

What was first to be settled ?

How was the Bible treated ?

By whom was this done ?

How do these persons proceed ?

*Page 145.*

Is the exercise of reason in matters of theology allowable ?

What must reason do ?

From what must it abstain ?

Of what can it judge ?

Of what may it not judge ?

What is one of its most useful exercises ?

*Page 146.*

What is founded on this ?

Why does philosophy now flourish ?

Into what should this principle be carried ?

When the authority of Christianity is established, what is our duty ?

What kind of truths may we properly discuss and decide upon ?

Give examples.

*Page 147.*

What kind of truths may we not discuss and decide upon ?

What was the conduct of the first Christians ?

*Page 148.*

In what respect should we imitate their example ?

What was the question with them ? What is it with us ?

In what respect was their conduct more reasonable and philosophical ?

What was the process of conversion among the first Christians ?

How did their hearing of the gospel differ from ours ?

Were they accomplished Christians as we may hope to be ?

*Page 149.*

What was enough for them and is enough for us ?

What should be discarded ? What should be submitted to ?

What objection is presented ? How is it refuted ?

*Page 150.*

How does the progress of astronomical differ from that of theological science ?

Is the latter advanced by the former ?

What ideas are exalted and extended by the new discoveries in astronomy ?

*Page 151.*

To what do these new triumphs of science bind us more firmly ?

What is one of the most signal triumphs of modern philosophy ? Where did this question lie ?

To what field did the maxims which guided philosophers to its solution restrain them ?

How would one of them have been regarded who should have speculated on the chymical constitution of the moon ?

*Page 152.*

What circumstance would justify such a speculation ? how ?

What philosophy is obscure and inaccessible ?

What presumption is disowned by philosophy ?

What would be a more glaring transgression of her maxims ?

What transition is unwarrantable ?

*Page 153.*

How should a revelation from heaven be received ?

In what volume should we study the counsels of the Divine mind ?

In what manner? With what instruments?

What more remains to be done?

Did Bacon put in practice his own principles?

*Page 154.*

Who did? how?

Which should we imitate? how?

What truths should we assent to, and put in practice?

## QUESTIONS

### FOR EXAMINATION OF STUDENTS ON THE NATURE OF TESTIMONY.

*Page 155.*

WHENCE do we derive the greater part of our knowledge?

Do we believe testimony as implicitly as we believe our senses?

By what circumstances is our belief of testimony affected?

What gives credit and authority to a narrator or witness?

By what are we influenced in receiving testimony?

*Page 156.*

What constitutes the *probability* of a statement?

What is its effect on our belief?

May we carry caution with respect to probability too far?

What is this extreme of caution apt to engender?

What is the error of a weak mind?

Of a contracted mind?

Give examples of natural but unwarrantable incredulity:

1. The peasant. 2. The person in respectable rank.
3. The king of Siam.

What does great and exclusive confidence in one's own experience, as the test of probability, characterize?

*Page 157.*

What is the natural effect of progress in knowledge?

May a cultivated mind discover truth in an apparently incredible statement? How is this illustrated?

To what principle does this illustration lead?

In judging of the credibility of a statement, are we to be influenced solely by our actual experience of similar events? why not?

*Page 158.*

How must we proceed?

Why would Archimedes have believed what his contemporaries would not?

Who might have corrected the king of Siam? how?

*Page 159.*

What do infidels affirm concerning miracles?

What does Mr. Hume say?

Who used the same mode of reasoning as Mr. Hume?

*Page 160.*

What fact do those who are imposed on by Mr. Hume's sophism overlook?

To what is experience limited?

How do we know what happened before that limited time?

Is our knowledge of the established course of nature drawn chiefly from testimony?

How must we gain new knowledge?

Do we habitually believe things entirely at variance with our personal observation? Furnish examples.

Could these be believed on Mr. Hume's principles?

*Page 161.*

What might a Highlander do on these principles?

What must be considered a fundamental principle of our nature?

To what three heads may we refer the characters of probability?

What is the effect of concurrence?

What statements do we receive on such testimony?

What name is applied to them?

What is the foundation of incredulity with respect to them?

By what recollection is a man of cultivated mind influenced in receiving upon testimony statements which the vulgar disbelieve?

*Page 162.*

By what perception is he influenced?

What illustration of this is given?

By what power is he guided in his inquiries?

How does the vulgar mind fail here ?  
 What does Mr. Hume admit  
 What instance does he name ?  
 What evidence does he require in this instance ?  
 How may these principles be considered ?  
 How is a probable statement received ?  
 Give an example.

*Page 163.*

How are less probable statements to be received ?  
 How the most extraordinary ?  
 How are extraordinary events distinguished ?  
 What is a marvellous event ? A miraculous one ?  
 What further is required ?  
 What species of testimony do we require concerning such an event ?  
 May a doubt still remain ? why ?  
 What gives a preponderance to the testimony ?

*Page 164.*

How great a preponderance ? Give an example.  
 What state would the mind be left in, on receiving evidence of such a fact ?  
 What two things are necessary to fix a distinct belief of miraculous interposition ?  
 What miracles possess these requisites ?  
 What makes them physically improbable ?  
 Is this necessary in order to make them real miracles ?  
 What elements of credibility have they ?  
 What was the state of mankind before Christ appeared ?

*Page 165.*

Of what was there the highest moral probability ?  
 What further was probable ?  
 Was there any improbability of the Deity's employing miracles for such a purpose ? How is this proved ?  
 From what does an important branch of the moral probability of the Scripture statements arise ?  
 Into what three parts does this part of the subject resolve itself ?  
 What fallacy has been ascribed to this mode of reasoning ?  
 Correctly ? What is the tendency of it ?  
 Of what is the compound evidence of miracles composed ?